



SINGAPORE CHILDREN'S SOCIETY

# YOUNG ADULTS' RECALL OF SCHOOL BULLYING

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SINGAPORE CHILDREN'S SOCIETY

Research Monograph No. 9

# YOUNG ADULTS' RECALL OF SCHOOL BULLYING

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## CONTENTS

<b>FOREWORD</b>	iii
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	v
<b>LIST OF RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS</b>	vi
<b>LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES</b>	vii
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	1
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</b>	3
What is bullying?	3
Bullying in different environments	4
Different forms of school bullying	4
Physical bullying	4
Verbal bullying	4
Relational bullying	4
A fourth form of bullying: cyber-bullying	5
Effects of bullying	6
Short term effects on victims	6
Long term effects on victims	7
Validity of results in retrospective studies	7
Long term outcomes among bullies	8
Other effects of bullying	8
Bully-victims	9
Victims' coping strategies	9
Anti-bullying agencies and programs	9
About this study	10
<b>CHAPTER 2: METHOD</b>	12
Participants	12
Materials	12
Screening questions – age, citizenship and place of education	12
Questions about types of bullying experienced and their effects	12
Help seeking and its perceived effectiveness	13
Psychometric tests	13
Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale	13
WHO-5 Well-Being Index (WHO-5)	14
Major Depression Inventory (MDI)	14
Qualitative information and feedback	14
Demographics	14
Procedure	15
<b>CHAPTER 3: FINDINGS FROM THE SURVEY</b>	16
Sample	16
Bullying prevalence	16

Bullying types reported by respondents	17
Bullying types by gender and ethnicity	18
Help seeking and its perceived effectiveness	18
Psychometric test results for Bullied and Not Bullied groups	19
Psychometric test results and Help Seeking	21
Comparison by Education level	21
Results of qualitative questions	22
<b>CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION</b>	23
Design of the survey	23
Defining bullying	23
Respondents in the survey	24
Perceived long term effects of bullying by respondents	24
Gender and Ethnicity differences in bullying prevalence and bullying types	24
Seeking help for bullying	25
Psychometric test results	26
Educational levels of respondents	27
Respondents' feedbacks	27
<b>CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION</b>	32
<b>REFERENCES</b>	33
<b>APPENDICES</b>	39
Appendix A: Supplementary results	39
Demographic variables	39
Bullying by Gender	40
Bullying by Ethnicity	40
Comparing the different forms of bullying by Gender and Ethnicity	41
Bullied and Affected group	43
Help seeking and its perceived effectiveness	43
Source of help respondents sought	44
Psychometric test results	44
Comparison of seeking help for bullying by Gender and Ethnicity	46
Psychometric test results and Help Seeking	46
Looking at possible relationships between the psychometric tests	47
The relationship between bullying types and psychometric tests	47
Comparison of bullying by highest education level attained	48
Qualitative questions	50
Appendix B: Questionnaire	56
Appendix C: List of internet addresses of anti-bullying agencies around the world	63
Appendix D: List of internet addresses of anti-bullying games mentioned in this monograph	64

## FOREWORD

### Young Adults's Recall of School Bullying

In pursuing our mission to bring relief and happiness to children in need, Singapore Children's Society always tried to identify and then fill significant service gaps, where problems and obstacles faced by many needy children in the mainstream were not addressed adequately by their families and the community.

Project CABIN was started in the mid 1990's, to provide a place of rest and discovery to some secondary school students, after school hours and within the schools, who otherwise would hang out in shopping malls as both their parents were working and not at home to watch over them. Through providing such a service, and together with the experience gained in reaching out to primary students through our Tinkle Friend helpline, we became aware that many students suffered from bullying in schools. Hence we started a public education programme, in 2004, to promote bully-free schools, and to increase awareness amongst students, teachers and parents, about the prevalence of bullying in schools, and how to deal with the associated problems.

Over the last six years, Children's Society ran many campaigns and programmes to advocate harmonious and mutually respectful living amongst students. Last year alone, our Bully-Free Campaign reached out to about 22,000 people, mostly children and teenagers. Our staff also visited 23 primary schools, and gave Bully-Free Talks to about 24,000 students. We are working with Park View Primary School, on a project to establish a bully-free school environment, and we shall share the experience of this project in due course with other schools and interested parties. This year, 2010, we are organizing our 6th annual Bully-Free Forum.

In line with our philosophy to be evidence-based in planning and delivering our services, we earlier conducted two surveys to find out the prevalence of bullying in secondary, and then primary schools: who were bullied, how they were bullied, what steps were taken by students to avoid and counter bullying, and how effective these steps were. These studies were published in 2008, in a monograph entitled *Bullying in Singapore Schools*.

After publishing this monograph we decided to conduct a survey of young adults age 25 to 29. We aimed to find out if bullying in school was similarly prevalent at their time, how bullying was done then, whether bullying had impacted the victims' life, and what steps were useful in enabling them to avoid bullying or overcome it.

This monograph gives a summary of the information that we collected from young adults who responded to these questions. These will be shared at the global conference of the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse & Neglect in Hawaii this year.

Interestingly, 25% of the young adult respondents said they were bullied in school, which matched the ratio of secondary school students who reported that they were bullied in school when we asked them in 2006.

The findings also showed that, on average, although the bullied group almost all indicated that they were not affected by bullying, they in fact had significantly lower self-esteem, poorer well-being, and were more depressed than the not-bullied group. One could surmise that the significant differences are partly a consequence of bullying, and partly because those with lower self-esteem were more likely to be bullied. To better understand the magnitude of these two factors, further studies will have to be conducted.

It should however be highlighted that despite the significant differences, the mean scores of the psychometric tests of the two groups were all in the 'good/normal' ranges of the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale, the WHO-Five Well-being Index, and the Major Depression Inventory scale, respectively.

Five respondents did state that they were adversely affected by bullying, and their responses were consistent with this. This is a very small number. However, there may have been other less forthcoming respondents in the bullied group, whose pride did not let them admit to being similarly affected, and it is in any case always moot to what extent individuals have accurate insight into the true effect of their own early experiences. The larger picture, provided by the bulk of respondents, suggests that whether they reported being affected or not, there was in fact a relationship between being bullied and lessened well-being.

Whilst the picture painted by this monograph is not as alarming as we feared, Children's Society is convinced that we have to continue working towards minimizing bullying in schools, to enable children to grow up in a more harmonious and friendly school environment, and to become confident and sociable adults, and make Singapore a kinder and happier country.

Children's Society is most fortunate to have a very strong and dedicated Research Committee, under the chairmanship of Associate Professor John Elliott. For many years, this Committee has overseen many useful studies, including this one, to give us the evidence to advocate for the well-being of needy children, and to plan and deliver services to them. Mr Winston Ong and Ms Sue Cheng of our Research and Outreach Centre have put in excellent and hard work in carrying out this study. The passion and perseverance shown by Ms Tan Bee Joo and Ms Christina Appadoo of our Student Service Hub, in running our many Bully-Free programmes over the last six years, and in contributing to the three bullying surveys, are also much appreciated.

The social service arm of Singapore Children's Society will take note of the findings contained in this monograph, to steer our next phase of planning and conducting of bully-free campaigns and programmes. The close partnership between it and our Society's Research arm will continue, to ensure that the launching of new services, and the re-invention or termination of existing ones, will all be evidence-based.

**Alex Lee Ka But, JP**

Chairman, Social Work Service Standing Committee  
Singapore Children's Society



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**Winston Ong**

Research Officer, Singapore Children's Society

**Associate Professor John Elliott**

Chairman, Research Committee, Singapore Children's Society

## LIST OF RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS

The present monograph is the latest in a series published by Singapore Children's Society.

Earlier monograph publications can be freely downloaded from the Singapore Children's Society's website at [http://www.childrensociety.org.sg/services/research\\_project.htm](http://www.childrensociety.org.sg/services/research_project.htm)

### No. Monograph title and description

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- 1 The *Public Perceptions of Child Abuse and Neglect in Singapore* published in December 1996, confronts the average Singaporean's thinking towards child abuse and neglect.
  - 2 The *Professional and Public Perceptions of Child Abuse and Neglect in Singapore: An Overview* published in April 2000 focuses on the attitudes of professionals towards abuse or neglect, and their opinions on the experience and reporting of child abuse and neglect.
  - 3 The *Professional and Public Perceptions of Physical Child Abuse and Neglect in Singapore* published in April 2000 focuses specifically on the attitudes of professionals and the public towards physical child abuse and neglect.
  - 4 *Emotional Maltreatment of Children in Singapore: Professional and Public Perceptions* published in February 2002 focuses on the attitudes of professionals and the public towards emotional child maltreatment.
  - 5 *Child Sexual Abuse in Singapore: Professional and Public Perceptions* published in June 2003 focuses specifically on the attitudes of professionals and the public towards child sexual abuse.
  - 6 *The Parenting Project: Disciplinary Practices, Child Care Arrangements and Parenting Practices in Singapore* published in October 2006 looks into how children are disciplined, who their main caregivers are, and how parents interact with their children in general.
  - 7 *Children's Social and Emotional Well-Being in Singapore* published in July 2008 examined parents' and children's perspectives on children's state of social and emotional well-being.
  - 8 *Bullying in Singapore Schools* published in July 2008 examined the prevalence of bullying in the Primary and Secondary schools of Singapore.
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## LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Findings from the Survey

Figure 1.	Bullied and Not Bullied respondents broken down by Ethnic Group.	17
Figure 2.	The effectiveness of help broken down by source of help.	19
Figure 3.	Distribution of scores for self esteem for Bullied and Not Bullied groups.	19
Figure 4.	Distribution of scores for Well-being for Bullied and Not Bullied groups.	20
Figure 5.	Major Depression Inventory scores for Bullied and Not-Bullied groups.	20
Table 1.	Prevalence of bullying, as among school children reported in 2008, and as recalled by young adults interviewed for inclusion in the present study.	16
Table 2.	Types of bullying respondents reported experiencing during their Primary and Secondary school days and its intensity.	17
Table 3.	Gender figures for bullying type "Been pushed around or beaten by others".	18
Table 4.	Gender figures for bullying type "Received threats of harm, intimidation or hostile gestures towards you".	18
Table 5.	Number of respondents with regards to their highest education level attained.	21

Appendix A

Table A1.	Breakdown of the type of household sampled.	39
Table A2.	Bullied and Not Bullied respondents broken down by Gender and Ethnicity.	39
Table A3.	Number of respondents in the Bullied and Not Bullied groups by gender.	40
Table A4.	Number of respondents in the Bullied and Not Bullied groups by ethnicity.	40
Table A5.	Results of chi-square test of goodness-of-fit for each type of bullying by gender.	41
Table A6.	Results of chi-square test of goodness-of-fit for each type of bullying by ethnicity.	42
Table A7.	Problems attributed to past school bullying experience by five respondents claiming to have been affected by past bullying experience.	43
Table A8.	Results reported by Bullied respondents after seeking help.	44
Table A9.	Results of help seeking reported by Bullied respondents, broken down into different sources.	44

Table A10.	Independent sample <i>t</i> -test results of each psychometric test between Bullied and Not Bullied group and its respective effect size.	45
Table A11.	Breakdown of Bullied and Not Bullied respondents based on well-being level.	45
Table A12.	Breakdown of Bullied and Not Bullied respondents based on depression level.	45
Table A13.	Independent samples <i>t</i> -test results of each psychometric test between respondents who sought help when bullied and those who did not.	46
Table A14.	Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient between the three psychometric tests.	47
Table A15.	Pearson's Correlation Coefficient ( <i>r</i> ) values of each type of bullying against the three psychometric tests.	48
Table A16.	Highest educational level attained by respondents broken down by bullying group.	48
Table A17.	One-way between groups ANOVA for the three psychometric tests by the highest education level respondents attained.	49
Table A18.	Figures and percentages of the 13 categories of suggestions by respondents.	52
Table A19.	Figures and percentages of the 9 categories of successful methods used by respondents to avoid bullying.	54

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Singapore Children's Society's Bully-free campaign was started in 2004 as the society expanded a focus on child abuse and neglect prevention to encompass bully prevention as part of its services. Two surveys were conducted as part of a bully-free initiative to find out the nature and prevalence of bullying in Singapore schools. The first survey was conducted in 2006 on secondary school students. The second survey, conducted in 2007, was directed at primary school students. The surveys looked at both the victims and the bullies. The various forms of bullying and their reported effects, as well as sources of support and their perceived effectiveness were investigated. Results of these two studies showed that more than one-fifth of the students interviewed reported being bullied. Research elsewhere has shown that, years after leaving their school and entering the workforce, victims were reportedly still psychologically affected by their past bullying experiences. The current survey reported in this monograph attempts to look for possible long-term effects of bullying on young adults after they leave school and enter the society. It is a retrospective study of the recollection of primary and secondary school bullying experiences by young adults.

### **Sample**

A demographically representative sample of 600 respondents of both sexes was recruited for the survey. Respondents were Singaporeans or Permanent Residents between the ages of 25 to 29 years old with a mean age of 26.8, all of whom had studied at a local Primary and/or Secondary school. Of the 600, 299 reported being bullied when at school and 301 reported not being bullied.

### **Procedure**

A questionnaire was drafted based on a review of past research. It consisted predominantly of quantitative multiple-choice questions, and obtained information about respondents' recollections of their school bullying experiences, if any, and demographic information. In addition, three psychometric tests were used to examine aspects of respondents' psychological health.

The Children's Society has an internal ethics review system, and ethics approval for the survey was obtained prior to the collection of any data. A pilot study gathered feedback on the suitability of the questions and the duration of the survey. This feedback was used to fine-tune the questionnaire.

Due to the scale of the survey, actual data collection was outsourced to a research company. Sampling was carried out using a computer program to randomly select blocks of flats and houses from a database of all public and private housing units in Singapore. Interviewers would then search for suitable candidates and ask if they were willing to participate in our survey. A token of appreciation was given to each respondent at the end of a successful interview. A letter which gave further details about the survey while assuring them confidentiality and the anonymity of their responses was included too. The letter also gave a contact number and a helpline

number should respondents need clarification or felt troubled after the interview. All analyses were carried out by the authors.

### **Findings**

More boys suffered from physical bullying and some form of verbal bullying as compared to girls. Malay respondents were more often the subject of bullying as compare to Chinese respondents. Only about one third of the bullied respondents sought help for their bullying experiences. Of these, more than half reported that seeking help had in fact helped them and that the situation had then got better. Teachers and parents were the two most common sources of help sought by respondents when bullied.

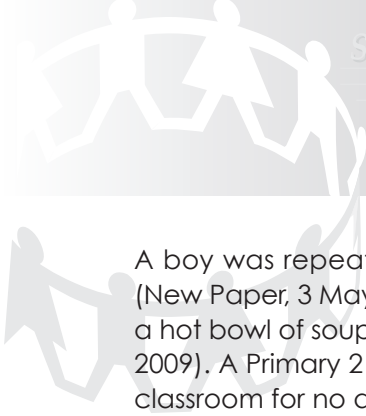
Respondents gave many suggestions as to what could have been done to prevent the bullying from happening. About a quarter of them mentioned seeking help as a good way to stop the bullying. Methods used by respondents to successfully avoid being bullied included avoiding and ignoring the bullies and seeking help.

Respondents' highest education level attained was unrelated to whether or not they reported being bullied, so there was no evidence to suggest bullying actually led to premature school leaving. However, bullied respondents on average had lower self-esteem and well-being when compared to respondents who had not been bullied. Bullied respondents were also found to be typically more depressed. However, virtually all respondents denied that they had been affected by the bullying.

### **Discussion**

Clearly there were differences in current levels of reported well-being, self-esteem and sub-clinical depression, as between young adult respondents who had or not reported being bullied when in school. In a retrospective study it cannot be determined with certainty whether these differences were in fact long-term effects of the reported bullying experience. It could be that personality or lack of resilience predisposes a child both to being bullied and to lower self-esteem and well-being later in life. Prospective studies would be needed to settle the matter, but the *prima facie* possibility of long term effects of bullying, that the victims are not aware of, or prefer not to mention, is a real one.

## CHAPTER 1 Introduction

A stylized illustration of children playing in a circle, with some children holding hands and others in various active poses. The illustration is in a light grey tone and is positioned on the left side of the page, partially overlapping the text area.

A boy was repeatedly taunted by a group of students because of his 'girly voice' (New Paper, 3 May 2009). A Secondary 4 student school counsellor was splashed with a hot bowl of soup and beaten up by a group of fellow students (New Paper, 19 April 2009). A Primary 2 girl was pushed, punched and kicked by a classmate outside her classroom for no apparent reason (Straits Times, 27 February 2009).

Elsewhere, a 14 year old boy in Malaysia was lured into a school visitor's room and beaten up by 10 other students on his birthday (Asiaone, 1 November 2008). A 15 year old student in Pahang, Malaysia, was scalded by a hot clothes iron by an older student for refusing to buy a pack of cigarettes for him (New Paper, 6 March 2009). A 15 year old girl hanged herself after receiving constant vicious text messages by nine teenagers from her school (Straits Times, 30 March 2010).

The list goes on and these are just a few of the many news reports we see almost every day. School bullying is not a new social problem but one that has existed for many decades. This has been shown in retrospective studies of school bullying experiences in older adults' (Lund *et al.*, 2008; Kidscape, 1999).

### **What is bullying?**

Dan Olweus, widely regarded as the pioneer researcher in the field of bullying, states "A person is bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons, and he or she has difficulty defending himself or herself" (1993a). In essence, it can be described as an intentional and repeated negative act of aggression, carried out by someone in a more powerful position on another person with the intent to cause harm or distress to that person's daily life (Carlisle & Rofes, 2007; Rigby, 2003). Given this definition, some have suggested that children with disability might be prone to bullying because of their display of limited or slow body movements (Flynt & Morton, 2004). Bullies might perceive children with disability as weak or consider themselves more powerful than their handicapped counterpart, increasing the likelihood of a bullying attack. Bullying may affect someone who belongs to an unfavourable group as well. For example, children who were considered to be obese or shorter than their peers were found in studies to be victimised more often (Janssen, Craig, Boyce & Pickett, 2004; Voss & Mulligan, 2000). Bullying has also been found in children who were identified as having lower levels of social acceptance and higher levels of social rejection among their peers within a group setting (Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, Österman, & Kaukiainen, 1996).

The Children's Society in its previous work has considered definitions of bullying:

"Although there is no standard definition of bullying, researchers have generally agreed on several key features of bullying. Bullying is seen as any hurtful behaviour committed that is both intentional and repetitive (Sveinsson & Morris, 2007). It has been linked to harmful physical, psychological or emotional consequences for the victim which can be

long lasting. There is also an imbalance of power between the bully and the victim, and this sense of power can be real or perceived. In this study, any intentional behaviour likely to cause harm, and committed on the respondents at least twice within a month in their previous school year, would be considered bullying" (Koh & Tan, 2008, p6).

### **Bullying in different environments**

Olweus began researching school bullying in Norway during the 1970s. Since then, research on school bullying has been carried out in other western countries like the UK, USA and Australia (Homel, 2007). Research in the east has revealed similar forms of bullying in countries like South Korea, Japan and Taiwan as well (Yang, Kim, Kim, Shine & Yoon, 2006; Taki, 2001; Wei, Jonson-Reid & Tsao, 2007; Hokoda, Lu & Angeles, 2006). While Olweus' (1978, 1993a, 1993b) focus was on school bullying and its impact on children, others found that it is present in diverse settings including (in adults) the workplace or the military (Homel, 2007; Rayner & Hoel, 1997).

### **Different forms of school bullying**

School bullying comes in many different forms. Research has by and large categorised them into three different forms, namely Physical, Verbal and Relational.

#### Physical bullying

This form of bullying generally involves physical contact between victim and bully. Actions like hitting, pushing, tripping, having one's belongings taken away, grabbing of limbs or hair and having objects thrown at fall under this category (Hunter, Mora-Merchán & Ortega, 2004; Powers & Cohen, 2004; Kidscape, 1999). Some studies have shown that boys were usually more often behind this form of bullying than girls (Powers & Cohen, 2004; Carlisle & Rofes, 2007). Boys were also more often the victims of such form of bullying (Berthold & Hoover, 2000).

#### Verbal bullying

Bullying by this technique includes threatening, taunting, malicious teasing, intimidation, insulting, and ridiculing (Carlisle & Rofes, 2007; Homel, 2007). Smokowski and Kopasz (2005) reported that such forms of bullying usually occur quickly and are thus harder to spot as compared to the physical forms. In addition, the impact is invisible as compared to physical bullying since victims are emotionally affected but do not show any scars.

#### Relational bullying

Spreading rumours, manipulating of friendships, gossiping, social exclusion and ostracizing are some of the methods used by bullies in this category (Carlisle & Rofes, 2007; Homel, 2007). An indirect form of bullying, relational bullying is regarded as a more sophisticated form of bullying due to the fact that a bully would require an understanding of human relationships to achieve success in this form of bullying. Thus, research has shown that younger children tend to report more physical forms of



bullying and it is only older children who used relational form of bullying to attack their victims (Hornell, 2007). Girls were more often found to employ this form of bullying as compared to boys (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005; Powers & Cohen, 2004).

#### **A fourth form of bullying: cyber-bullying**

The age of information technology in developed countries has provided their societies with a lot of advantages. The availability of mobile phones and fast internet connections everywhere gives users enormous benefits by offering much convenience. But an undesirable side effect has emerged, namely cyber-bullying.

Mesch (2009, p. 388) described cyberbullying as "willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of e-mail, cell phone, instant messaging, and defamatory Web sites. It is an act of aggression that can take the form of purposeful harassment, such as making unwanted, derogative, nasty, or threatening comments through electronic communications or spreading rumors, short clips, or altered photos that are offensive or embarrassing the victim by posting them on a Web site".

Willard (2007) identified eight common forms of cyberbullying:

- (1) Flaming: Sending angry, rude, vulgar messages about a person to an online group or to that person via email or other text messaging.
- (2) Online harassment: Repeatedly sending offensive messages via email or other text messaging to a person.
- (3) Cyberstalking: Repeated, intense online harassment that includes threats of harm or creates significant fear.
- (4) Denigration: Sending harmful, untrue, or cruel gossip or rumours about a person to damage his or her reputation or friendships.
- (5) Impersonation/Masquerade: Pretending to be someone else and sending or posting material that makes that person look bad.
- (6) Trickery: Talking someone into revealing secrets or embarrassing information, then sharing it online.
- (7) Outing: Sending or posting material about a person that contains sensitive, private, or embarrassing information, including forwarding private messages or images.
- (8) Exclusion: Cruelly excluding someone from an online group.

News reports highlighted problems in Japan where youths were found to make use of mobile phones and the cyberspace to carry out their bullying attacks on others (Yomiuri Shimbun, 21 July 2008). What made the problem worse was that Japanese youths were so 'wired' in their daily lives that many reported that they cannot live without their mobile phones (Straits Times, 12 January 2008). These youths felt the need to constantly stay connected to the cyberworld and remain contactable at all times. They were also noted as saying that they felt insecure without their mobile phones by their sides. The situation would, of course, naturally increase the chances of being bullied given the constant exposure potential victims are subjecting themselves to. To curtail this concern, the Japanese government was reported to have considered revising its policy to regulate the use of mobile phones by youths to curb crimes and bullying associated with the use of mobile phones (Straits Times, 28 May 2008).

The problem extends to younger students as well. News report of a study carried out in England found that one in five primary school children claimed to have been bullied online or by phone (BBC, 16 November 2009). It was also reported that 23% of parents surveyed would allow a child under the age of 11 years old to go on the internet unsupervised at home while 38% of the parents had or would allow a child of similar age access to a mobile phone as well. News on cyber-bullying in Singapore, including sending of hate emails, posting of digitally defaced photos on online blogs, having a video recording of a victim being beaten up posted online and masquerading as someone else to deceive a victim, have been reported (Straits Times, 11 March 2008). And with the increase in number of mobile phones ownership among youths and children in Singapore, concerns on their possible misuse was raised recently (My Paper, 5 October 2009).

### **Effects of bullying**

After reviewing studies investigating the effects of bullying, Rigby (2003) classified possible negative health condition outcomes into four categories: Low Psychological Well-Being, Poor Social Adjustment, Psychological Distress and Physical Ill-health Symptoms.

Low Psychological Well-Being referred to mental states which, although not deemed to be distressing, contributed to a person's general unhappiness. Research on this area looked for possible symptoms of low self-esteem, and feelings of anger and sadness.

Poor Social Adjustment talked about the inability of people to adapt to their environment. Research on this area focused on respondents who loathed going to a certain place. For example, a student might not enjoy attending school because of being bullied. Loneliness, isolation and absenteeism are some of the possible symptoms.

Psychological Distress, which Rigby considered to be more serious than Low psychological well-being and Poor social adjustment, is characterised by high levels of anxiety, depression and suicidal thinking in respondents.

Lastly, research on Physical Ill-health Symptoms deals with obvious signs of commonly diagnosed medical conditions which included psychosomatic symptoms like headaches and stomachaches (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005).

#### Short term effects on victims

Much research has shown that bullying could have a detrimental effect on victims. A follow-up study by Rigby (1999) found bullied students suffered from poorer physical health and mental well-being after comparing test results when they were 8 - 9 years old with results when they were 11 - 12. In Japan, Princess Aiko, the granddaughter of the Emperor was reported to have skipped school because she developed a stomachache and felt anxious after bullying by boys at her elementary school (Straits Times, 6 March 2010). Research has found that such psychosomatic symptoms are fairly common and bullied students have a tendency to detest going to schools or

have trouble concentrating during lessons, leading to a decline in academic results (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005).

Another study, in the Netherlands, found that children who were bullied had a higher chance of being diagnosed with new psychosomatic and psychosocial problems as compared to children who were not bullied (Fekkes, Plijpers, Fredriks, Vogels & Verloove-Vanhorick, 2006). The researchers measured 1118 children at the beginning and end of a school year. They found that children who reported being bullied at the beginning of the school year, were more prone to developing symptoms such as depression, anxiety, bedwetting, abdominal pain and feelings of being tense over the course of the school year than those who reported not being bullied.

In extreme cases, youths have been reported to commit suicide because of bullying (BBC, 16 July 2008; Herald Sun, 31 July 2008; BBC, 6 May 2009). Berthold and Hoover (2000) found that victims were significantly less likely to feel that people around them cared about them and more likely to feel that others would be better off without them than non-victims. In addition, victims were more predisposed to find schools difficult and be afraid of attending lessons. These findings might go some way to explain why some bullied victims might choose to end their lives.

#### Long term effects on victims

Research had also found possible long-term effects of bullying on victims. Lund *et al.* (2008) conducted a study on 6,049 Danish male participants born in 1953 to find out the long-term effects of school bullying. Lund *et al.* used the Major Depression Inventory (MDI) and found that those who recalled being victims when they were young were at a significantly increased risk of being diagnosed with depression. A study from Gilmartin (1987, cited by Carlisle & Rofes, 2007) found that a high percentage of bullied male victims tend to remain single and never got married. Smith, Singer, Hoel and Cooper (2003) found that students who were victims of bullying in schools were more likely to be subsequently bullied at their workplace as well, and this finding extended to those who were bullied but were also themselves bullies.

#### Validity of results in retrospective studies

Results of retrospective studies like the ones mentioned above do not necessarily show a causal relationship between school bullying and the undesirable long-term effects. Findings from such studies only showed an association, and causal direction is not certain. We do not know, for example, if being bullied in school led respondents to become shy and lonely or if their shyness trait led them to being victimised in the first place. It is also possible that an unknown extraneous factor resulted in the correlation. Unlike longitudinal studies, in which researchers monitor changes in behaviour over a period of time, there is no baseline for comparison within participants to settle the interpretation.

Lund *et al.*'s (2008) study, though retrospective in design had many measures in place to control extraneous variables from confounding the results. Victims were still found

to have a higher risk of being diagnosed with depression after accounting for Social Economic Status (SES) and parental mental illness later on in their lives (31-51 yrs old). This was true even after controlling for participants who had been diagnosed with depression before, suggesting that the bullying was responsible for the high risk. Lund *et al.* also found that the longer the duration or the higher the intensity the bullying was for victims, the higher chances of being diagnosed with depression.

Longitudinal studies on long-term effects of bullying by Olweus (1993, cited by Carlisle and Rofes, 2007) found that former victims of school bullying had significantly higher levels of depression and lower self-esteem than those who were not after following them into adulthood. In this research the causal effect is clear. Thus, the evidence from Olweus' longitudinal study and Lund *et al.*'s cross-sectional study taken together lend some confidence to an interpretation of bullying as the cause of later differences, and provide some confidence that the results of other retrospective studies might be interpreted in the same way.

#### Long term outcomes among bullies

Studies have also shown that school bullies were more at long-term risk of future violent conduct and anti-social behaviours once they became adults (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). A review of many longitudinal studies by Ma, Stewin and Mah (2001) provided evidence that school bullies were more likely to run foul of the law later on in their lives as compared to those who were not. Bullying is commonly associated with future adult criminal behaviours like vandalism, shoplifting and the use of drugs or alcohol (Power & Cohen, 2004). Spousal violence has also been shown to be more common among bullies (Homel, 2007). It seemed that bullies believed in using violence to solve problems. It could be possible that the use of violence, having proven effective when they were in schools, guided them to continue behaving in the same way in their adulthood. However, these long term trends are not so much a result of being a bully when younger, as simply a continuation of the same kind of behaviour into later life.

#### Other effects of bullying

Not all victims are unresisting in the face of bullying. Some victims may choose to retaliate against their perpetrator in a rather violent fashion. In China, a 12 year old boy who had been bullied by his peers used rat poison on those bullies by poisoning their water (China Daily, 10 December 2009). News reports of student victims of other countries utilising firearms against their tormentors can be found every now and then (Straits Times, 13 December 2007; Channel News Asia, 22 August 2008). Often, the reason these victims used firearms was to swiftly end the bullying problems they had to face repeatedly in school. Unlike the gun culture of countries like USA, such lethal weapons are not as easy to acquire in Singapore. Still, dangerous objects like a dagger or a steel pipe can be easily acquired and brought to schools if desired. In a nationwide check in schools by the police, local students were found to have smuggled in penknives, knives and even choppers in their schoolbags (New Paper, 16 March 2009). The presence of such weapons in school endangers everyone in the compound. Bullies might use it to threaten their victims and the victims themselves could also carry weapons to schools to get back at their aggressors.

### Bully-victims

Some victims themselves might also be bullies, attacking others while being targeted as well; becoming what has been termed bully-victims (Smith *et al.*, 2003). Research has shown that bullied respondents were three times more likely to bully others than those who were not (Berthold & Hoover, 2000). A concern here is that if victims are more likely to bully others, it might form a disturbing cycle. As more victims turned into bully-victims, it might be possible that this could create even more bully-victims when they bully others. The end result could be an increase in the number of bullying incidents over time.

### **Victims' coping strategies**

Some studies on bullying looked at the various types of coping strategies employed by victims of bullying. Often, such studies also tried to find out the effectiveness of the different strategies. Kochenderfer and Ladd (1997) looked at the success rate of different strategies in a longitudinal study of 5 – 6 year olds. They found that telling a teacher and getting a friend to help were used more by pupils whose victimisation scores decreased over time. Fighting back and walking away, were used more by pupils whose victimisation scores increased over time, suggesting these were less effective strategies. Smith, Shu, and Madsen (2001) also found evidence of crying and running away as a less successful strategy, which they believed was because it was a "socially unskilled response". Conversely, they found ignoring and fighting back were more successful strategies which the authors believed were "socially skilled responses". Hunter *et al.* (2004) believed that ignoring was a more successful strategy than running away in Smith *et al.*'s study because the children were actively dealing with the problem when they are ignoring the bullies, as compared to avoiding the bullies. Salmivalli, Karhunen, and Lagerspetz (1996) found that 12-13 year old Finnish pupils rated nonchalance as being a more constructive response to bullying than either counter-aggression or helplessness. Studies have also found gender differences in coping strategies at school. Fighting back has been found to be a more common response in boys, and telling a friend or an adult, or crying, more common in girls; other strategies such as ignoring the bully did not show a strong gender difference (Smith & Shu, 2000).

### **Anti-bullying agencies and programs**

These many undesirable outcomes have led to the emergence of numerous organisations in different countries trying to fight bullying. Some of these anti-bullying organisations were started by government agencies. For example, the New Zealand Police collaborated with a telecommunication company to set up a website to educate children on bullying. *Bullying. No Way!* is another such website created by the Australian education authorities. In Singapore, the Bully-free Campaign has been initiated by the Singapore Children's Society, a voluntary welfare organization. The society has information on its website with regards to bullying and how to combat it. Its annual Bully-free Forum tries to reach out to more people and further raise the level of awareness about the issue.

There are other such agencies founded by people who also recognised school bullying as a social issue and decided to act on it. In Singapore, Miss Esther Ng recently won the Extraordinary Women Award by Channel NewsAsia in 2009 for her fight against bullying. She established the Coalition Against Bullying for Children and Youth (CABCY) in 2005 and has conducted research on bullying related issues. CABCY provides talks, workshops & consultation as part of its services, along with anti-bullying resources in the form of books and DVDs. Liz Carnell from the United Kingdom started *Bullying Online* (now known as *Bullying UK*) in 1999 after discovering that her son was a victim of bullying in school. She started by using emails to give advice, support and encouragement to victims. Later on, her services expanded to conducting workshops, speaking at conferences and working with schools and other agencies. For her effort, she won numerous awards in the UK.

The founding of such organisations to champion the fight against bullying helps to raise awareness of the problem and educate the public. The awards they have won for their efforts show that the public acknowledges that bullying is not something which should be accepted as part and parcel of life and are supportive of the work being done to tackle the problem.

In recent years, educating students on bully prevention has expanded from role-playing and video viewing to using computer and board games. The computer program *FearNot!* from Ecircus place the user in the position of an advisor to a virtual victim of bullying. In the program, the virtual victim would seek advice after a bullying incident took place and the user can offer advice, after which the victim will try it out. The "Stand Up to the Bully" game by Building Strong Families is a board game played on a computer by up to four users. It is played in a similar fashion to the Monopoly board game from Hasbro, by clicking on a mouse to throw a dice. Players then answer questions relating to bullying to score virtual play money and the winner is the one with the most money. A card version is also available. The 'Anti-Bullying Game' is a board game from the Therapeutic Resources Company which focused more on the players' emotional aspects of being bullied. The creators of these different anti-bullying games seek to enhance the learning experience of the users through the use of technology and interactive fun. Unlike in the past, most children nowadays have access to internet and can acquire information on how to prevent them from becoming vulnerable to bullying. Thus, it is only right that we start educating children to make use of these resources as well as training them on the safe use of internet.

Please see appendix C for a list of anti-bullying agencies around the world and appendix D for the anti-bullying games mentioned above.

### **About this study**

Results of the two previous bullying surveys showed that more than a fifth of primary and secondary school students in Singapore reported being bullied in school, defined as having experienced any intentional behaviour likely to cause harm, and committed on the respondents at least twice within a month in their previous school year (Koh

& Tan, 2008). There was no known local research exploring the possible relationship between school bullying and long-term effects, such as appears to have been found overseas. For that reason, this study used a retrospective approach to collect past bullying experiences in schools from young adults, together with measures of their current well-being, and whether or not they felt being bullied in school had affected them in adult life.

In this study, the focus was on the victims of bullying that had occurred over a decade previously. Respondents were split into two groups, Bullied and Not Bullied, depending on their response as to whether they reported being bullied before in their primary and/or secondary schools. Comparisons were then made using the data collected from the questionnaires.

Our study looked into the areas of poor psychological well-being and psychological distress as proposed by Rigby (2003). Respondents were measured on their levels of self-esteem, well-being and depression using psychometric tests. In addition, we asked respondents how they were affected by the bullying and what were the types of bullying they had encountered. We also asked if they had sought help for the bullying and how effective such help had been. Enquires were made to see if respondents in our sample felt something could have been done back then to prevent the bullying from happening. We also checked with respondents to see if they ever had a successful attempt in avoiding a potential bullying experience and we enquired about their highest education level attained.

## CHAPTER 2 Method

### Participants

A stratified random household-based sample of 600 respondents between the ages of 25 to 29 years old with a mean age of 26.8 years was recruited for the survey, in 2009. By gender, 293 were male and 307 were female. Only Singaporeans or Permanent Residents, who had attended a local Primary and/or Secondary school, were eligible for inclusion. The sample was stratified by ethnicity to reflect the population distribution as indicated in the Department of Statistics Monthly Digest of Statistics, for May 2009. This yielded 438 Chinese, 93 Malays, 52 Indians and 17 Others. Of these, 301 reported having been bullied and 299 not having been bullied.

### Materials

A questionnaire for use in a structured interview was crafted after literature review of studies on long-term effects of bullying. It consisted, for the most part, of multiple choice questions with a few qualitative questions on respondents' views. In addition, it incorporated three psychometric tests to assess respondents' self-esteem, overall mental well-being and depression level respectively. The complete questionnaire is at appendix B.

The questionnaire was only produced in English. This is because our sample of young adults had all attended a local school, which used English as the medium. Thus, translation of the questionnaire to mother tongues was deemed to be unnecessary.

The questionnaire consisted of seven sections: -

#### 1. *Screening questions – age, citizenship and place of education*

This section of the questionnaire determined if a candidate fitted our selection criteria as stated above. For those who did not fit the criteria, the interviewer thanked them and move on to the next household without collecting any further data.

#### 2. *Questions about types of bullying experienced and their effects*

This data were used to establish which group respondents belong to (Bullied or Not Bullied). Respondents were asked if they felt they have been bullied during their primary and/or secondary schools days. Respondents were told that bullying means repeated and intentional attempts by others to hurt them or cause distress to their daily lives.

To allow comparability between the Bullied and Not Bullied groups, similar cell sizes was planned for both groups. When the number of respondents required for a group had been attained, interviewers were informed by the fieldwork manager to cease data collection from respondents belonging to that group. Once this occurred, the interviewers would end their interviews at this section of the questionnaire and further data would not be collected for future respondents in the filled group.



Those who felt they had been bullied were asked if they believed the bullying had affected their lives now, and if so, in what ways. Symptoms like feelings of shyness, depressed, being easily anxious or frustrated were listed as choices for respondents to choose from in the questionnaire. Respondents had to decide if they felt any of the symptoms might be attributed to the bullying incidents.

Next, respondents were asked to choose from a list of the kind of bullying they experienced, and the frequency. Seven different types of bullying (response options) were presented, categorised into Physical, Verbal and Relational bullying. Respondents were also given a choice to report other forms of bullying which did not fall under the seven that were listed in the questionnaire. They were not asked about cyber-bullying because a pilot study found that young adults in our target group were not exposed to such forms of bullying during their years in schools. Intensity of each type of bullying consisted of six different levels, from "Never" as the lowest level to "Daily/Almost daily" as the highest level.

### *3. Help seeking and its perceived effectiveness*

For bullied respondents, we next asked if they had sought help for it and how effective the help was. Respondents could provide up to two sources of help they had used. For each source of help, respondents were asked about the effect of seeking help (the situation improved, was made worse, or there was no effect at all after seeking help).

### *4. Psychometric tests*

Three psychometric tests were chosen to compare the Bullied and Not Bullied groups. Respondents were asked to answer all the items on each test. Different points were awarded for each item on each test depending on respondents' answers. The sum of the points for each test represented their scores on that particular test. Mean scores for Bullied and Not Bullied group of respondents were obtained for comparisons. A brief description of each test is as follows:-

The Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), measures a person's level of self-esteem. It has been widely used in research since its publication and has been found to have a high level of reliability and internal consistency in measuring global self-esteem (Grey-Little, Williams & Hancock, 1997). A study conducted in fifty-three countries around the world found that the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale has internal reliability within each culture (Schmitt & Allik, 2005). The scale consists of ten items asking respondents' perception of themselves and how they compare themselves with others. A score is assigned to each item and the scores are then added up. Total score for the scale ranged from 0 – 30 with a high score indicating a high level of self-esteem.

The WHO-5 Well-being Index (WHO-5) was developed at the Frederiksborg General Hospital in Hillerød, Denmark, which was a World Health Organisation Collaborating Centre for Mental Health. It measures a person's overall psychological well-being. It has been used as a screening tool for possible depression in patients with diabetes (De Wit, Pouwer, Gemke, Delemarre-van de Waal & Snoek, 2007). The WHO-5 was also administered successfully in health care settings in Asian countries. Translations to languages like Japanese (WHO-5-J) and Thai (WHO-5-T) were found to be reliable in screening patients' level of well-being (Saipanish, Lotrakul & Sumrithe, 2009; Awata *et al.*, 2007). Using a five item, six-point Likert scale questionnaire, respondents select the answer which they most identify with. The questions seek to find out the frequency of each kind of positive feeling they have been having in recent weeks. Scores for the test ranged from 0 – 25. The higher the score a respondent had, the better the respondent's level of well-being. The test also allows a respondent's total score to be categorised as reflecting either Good or Poor Well-being. Scores falling below the median (13) indicated poor well-being, while scores of 13 and above are considered as having good well-being.

The Major Depression Inventory (MDI) was developed at the same Frederiksborg General Hospital as the WHO-5. It is used as a depression rating scale to measure the severity of depression, if any. It has been found to be better than the Zung Self-Rating Depression Scale in diagnosing depression in patients with Parkinson's disease (Bech & Wermuth, 1998). The twelve items in the inventory asked respondents about the frequency of each type of negative feelings they had in recent weeks. The higher the score, the more depressed the respondent is deemed to be. Developers of the inventory cater for the option to use it as a depression rating scale. The score for each respondent could then be totalled up and categorised: None (< 20), Mild (20 – 24), Moderate (25 – 29) or Severe (30 – 50).

##### 5. *Qualitative information and feedback*

Questions from this section aimed to find out from respondents issues concerning the prevention and avoidance of bullying episodes. Respondents were queried on whether they felt anything could have been done to stop or prevent the bullying incidents. Respondents were subsequently asked if they had ever encountered a situation where they managed to avoid getting bullied.

##### 6. *Demographics*

Here, we recorded respondents' gender, ethnicity, highest educational level attained and housing type.

Respondents who did not complete education beyond secondary school levels were also asked if being bullied was one of the reasons for leaving school. This question also served as a check to see if respondents who reported not being bullied before would answer "No". If respondents answered "Yes" to the question, clarification was sought.

To attain stratification of gender and ethnicity, the fieldwork manager would receive updates from the interviewers on the demography of respondents who had completed the interviews. Once the required figure of a gender or ethnic group had been achieved, the manager would inform interviewers to cease data collection from respondents of that particular group. From then on, interviewers would first verify respondent's demography when they satisfied the requirements in sections 1 and 2 of the questionnaire before the interview would proceed. If the respondent's demography fell under the one already filled, the interviewer would thank the respondent and end the interview. No additional data were collected once this happened.

### **Procedure**

Ethics approval for the survey was obtained prior to the start of a pilot study. The pilot study was carried out to find out if the respondents who fit our selection criteria had any difficulty understanding the questions and if there were any difficulty administering the questionnaire. Pilot respondents were volunteers gathered using snowballing methods. Feedbacks pertaining to the relevancy of the questions asked (e.g., cyber-bullying was non-existent during their time) and duration of the interview were used to finalise the questionnaire.

InResearch Pte Ltd was engaged for the collection of data for this survey. Assigned interviewers were briefed on how to administer the questionnaire and instructed on the need to obtain the respondents' verbal consent before an interview could begin. Should the interviewee wish to end the interview at any point of time for any reason, the interview had to stop and the data were discarded. Stratified random sampling was obtained from a computerised database of all the public and private housing units in Singapore. Once a block of flat had been identified, the assigned interviewer would then approach every household in the block for suitable and willing candidates. Interviews were carried out at the doorsteps and verbal consent was sought prior to commencement. Participants were informed that the survey was about the recollection of bullying experience in schools and was purely voluntary, and would take approximately fifteen minutes to complete.

A token of appreciation in the form of a Singapore Children's Society mobile phone strap and a \$5 bookshop voucher was given to the respondent at the end of each completed interview, together with a 'Thank You' letter, explaining in further details the purpose of the survey, while again assuring them the confidentiality of their participation in the survey and the anonymity of their responses. A contact number was provided in the letter should the need for further clarification be required. A helpline number was also included lest respondents felt troubled after participation in the survey.

## CHAPTER 3

### Findings From The Survey

A summary of the more salient findings is reported here. For a more detailed breakdown and analysis of results, please refer to appendix A.

#### Sample

A total sample size of 600 was acquired for this study. 293 male and 307 female respondents participated in the survey. Ethnicity breakdown of respondents was 438 Chinese, 93 Malay, 52 Indians and 17 Others.

#### Bullying prevalence

Bullying in school was reported by a quarter of the initial 400 respondents (see Table 1). Once the prevalence of bullying in young adults was established, interviewers were asked to confine further interviews to respondents who experienced bullying in schools only. The purpose of this was to achieve equal size cells from both groups for comparisons. The next 200 responses, from bullied respondents only, were added to the initial sample to achieve a total of 600 responses.

We can see that the prevalence rate reported by young adults was quite similar to the two previous surveys where somewhat over one-fifth of the respondents were reported to be victims of bullying (Koh & Tan, 2008).

	Primary	Secondary	Young Adults
Bullied	21.0% N = 165	24.6% N = 126	25.3% N = 101
Not Bullied	79.0% N = 603	75.4% N = 387	74.7% N = 299

Table 1. Prevalence of bullying, as among school children reported in 2008, and as recalled by young adults interviewed for inclusion in the present study.

Of the 301 Bullied respondents, only 5 reported that they felt affected by the bullying even till today. The majority of the victims (98.3%) indicated that bullying had not affected them in any way. Given the small numbers of those who were affected by the bullying, statistical analysis is not appropriate (See appendix A, Table A7 for more details).

We found no evidence of either male or female respondents reporting more bullying. When comparing bullying prevalence rate across the major ethnic groups, we found that there were proportionally more Malays than Chinese who were bullied in schools (see Figure 1). No other significant difference was found for other ethnic group comparisons.

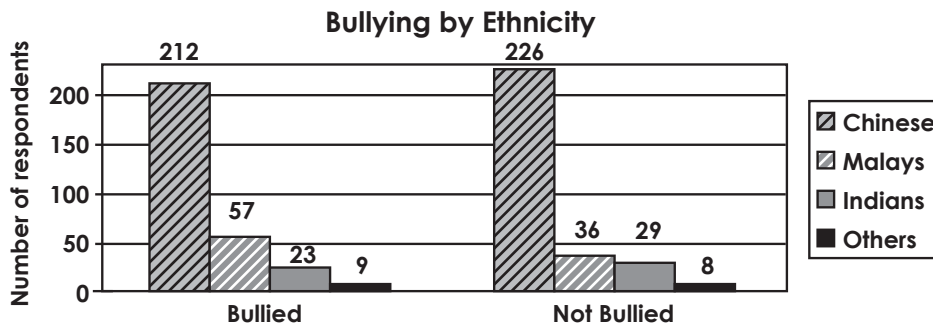


Figure 1. Bullied and Not Bullied respondents broken down by Ethnic Group.

Bullied respondents were asked about the kind of bullying they had encountered during their school days. Results showed that male respondents were more often the subject of actions such as hitting, pushing and receiving threats of harm, intimidation or hostile gestures than female respondents, but there were no other gender differences and no ethnic differences in the kinds of bullying reported.

#### Bullying types reported by respondents

Respondents were asked if they had encountered each of the following bullying types in Table 2 and if so, how often. The level of "Less often/hardly ever" was the highest count reported for all seven types of bullying.

	Daily/ almost daily	About once a week	2-3 times a month	Once a month	Less often /hardly ever	Never	Total
Been pushed around or beaten by others	4 1.3%	14 4.7%	34 11.3%	45 15.0%	120 39.9%	84 27.9%	301 100%
Received threats of harm, intimidation or hostile gestures towards you	2 0.7%	18 6.0%	21 7.0%	60 19.9%	121 40.2%	79 26.2%	301 100%
Been taunted, scolded or had vulgarities hurled at you	16 5.3%	31 10.3%	36 12.0%	58 19.3%	111 36.9%	49 16.3%	301 100%
Been teased about something or received sarcasm in a malicious or cruel way	9 3.0%	27 9.0%	46 15.3%	71 23.6%	101 33.6%	47 15.6%	301 100%
Been called nasty names or received degrading comments about you	18 6.0%	50 16.6%	50 16.6%	62 20.6%	76 25.2%	45 15.0%	301 100%
Suffered from group exclusion or the dissolving/manipulating of friendships	7 2.3%	43 14.3%	50 16.6%	43 14.3%	82 27.2%	76 25.2%	301 100%
Had people spread nasty rumours or gossiped something bad about you	9 3.0%	31 10.3%	70 23.3%	47 15.6%	94 31.2%	50 16.6%	301 100%

Table 2. Types of bullying respondents reported experiencing during their Primary and Secondary school days and its intensity. Note that respondents could make responses to more than one type of bullying.

If we applied the definition of bullying from the previous study by Koh and Tan (2008), percentages among present respondents were found to vary from 14% - 39%, depending on the type of bullying. But we do not know if any respondents in the Not Bullied group would also fit the Koh & Tan definition, as we only enquired about the frequency of bullying among those respondents who classified themselves as having been bullied.

### **Bullying types by gender and ethnicity**

Statistical analysis on each of the bullying type found that male respondents (82.9%) were more likely to be bullied than female respondents (61.9%) in the manner "Been pushed around or beaten by others" (Table 3). Male respondents (84%) were also more likely to be bullied than female respondents (64%) in the manner "Received threats of harm, intimidation or hostile gestures towards you" (Table 4).

	Male	Female
Bullied Before	121 (82.9%)	96 (61.9%)
Never Bullied	25 (17.1%)	59 (38.1%)
Total	146 (100%)	155 (100%)

Table 3. Gender figures for bullying type "Been pushed around or beaten by others".

	Male	Female
Bullied Before	123 (84.0%)	99 (64.0%)
Never Bullied	23 (16.0%)	56 (36.0%)
Total	146 (100%)	155 (100%)

Table 4. Gender figures for bullying type "Received threats of harm, intimidation or hostile gestures towards you".

There was no difference between genders for the other bullying type comparisons. Frequency of each bullying type did not differ between ethnic groups either.

### **Help seeking and its perceived effectiveness**

In our survey, we asked respondents if they had sought help as a coping strategy to stop the bullying. Results showed that only about one-third of the bullied respondents had done so. We also found that respondents who did seek help had success in improving the bullying situation by more than sixty percent on average; while the percentage of respondents who reported a worsening of the bullying situation after seeking help was less than ten percent, see Figure 2.

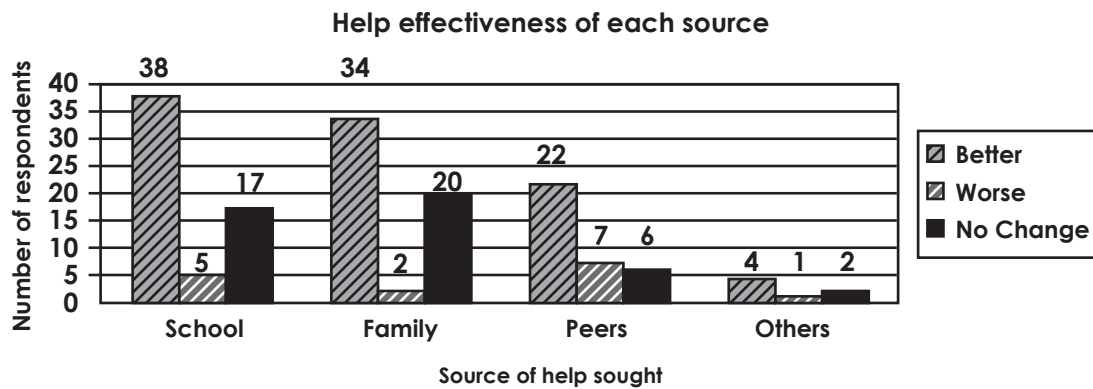


Figure 2. The effectiveness of help broken down by source of help. Note that respondents could give up to two sources of help.

Sources of help which bullied respondents preferred include the school (e.g. teachers, discipline masters), parents and peers. The chances of a bullying incident subsiding would seem to increase so long as respondents looked for assistance. Analyses carried out on help seeking with respect to gender and ethnicity factors revealed no significant difference. Both male and female respondents were just as likely to seek help for bullying. These results support a conclusion that children can be advised to seek help when being bullied, depending on circumstances.

### Psychometric test results for Bullied and Not Bullied groups

Three psychometric tests were used to compare between the Bullied and Not Bullied group. Scores on the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale, the WHO-5 Well-being Index and the Major Depression Inventory were calculated for each respondent and the means were compared.

On the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale, the Not-Bullied respondents scored higher in self-esteem ( $M = 20.3, SD = 3.2$ ) than the Bullied group ( $M = 19.0, SD = 3.8$ ). Given the size of the sample this is a significant difference, but the distribution of scores shows considerable overlap, see Figure 3.

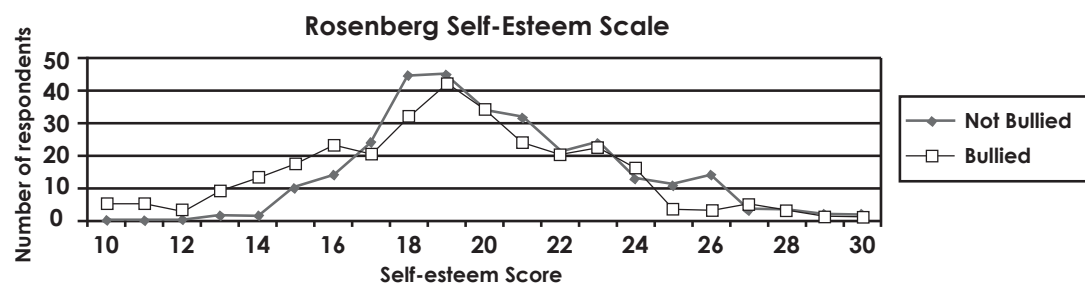


Figure 3. Distribution of scores for self esteem for Bullied and Not Bullied groups. Higher scores denote higher self esteem. Note the extensive overlap of scores.

On the WHO-5 Well-being Index (WHO-5), the Not Bullied group have higher average scores ( $M = 17.2$ ,  $SD = 4.2$ ) in well-being on average as compare to the Bullied group ( $M = 15.7$ ,  $SD = 4.3$ ). We also found that more respondents from the Bullied group than the Not Bullied had scores which would classify them as having Poor Well-being. However, as with self-esteem, the scores from the two groups showed considerable overlap, see Figure 4.

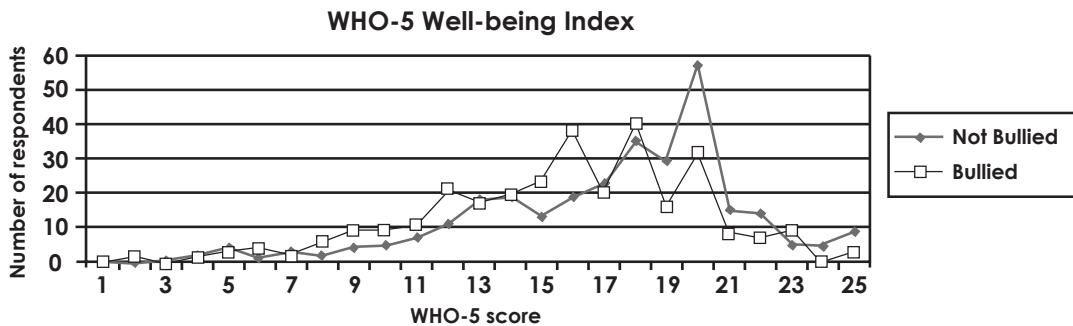


Figure 4. Distribution of scores for Well-being for Bullied and Not Bullied groups. Higher scores denote greater well-being. Note the extensive overlap of scores, and the skew to higher levels of well-being in both groups.

The Major Depression Inventory (MDI) test results showed respondents in the Bullied group being scored as more depressed on average ( $M = 12.8$ ,  $SD = 7.5$ ), compared to those in the Not Bullied Group ( $M = 10.0$ ,  $SD = 7.1$ ). If participants are categorised by level of severity, results reveal more respondents in the Severe, Moderate and Mild categories for the Bullied than the Not Bullied group. As with the other two tests there was an extensive overlap of scores, which were moreover skewed in the direction of low depression in both groups, see Figure 5. Note that in interpreting these scores that this is a screening instrument, and high scores need not imply a level of overt depression or warrant an intervention.

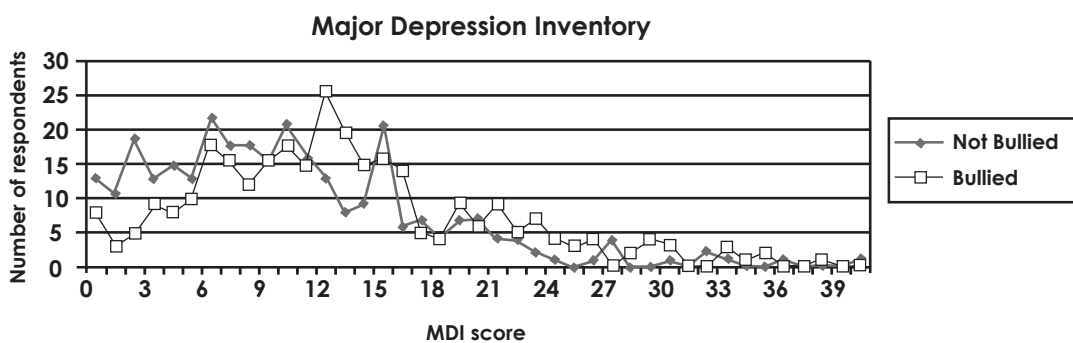


Figure 5. Major Depression Inventory scores for Bullied and Not-Bullied groups. The distributions are skewed with a small minority in both groups tending to the high scores indicative of higher depression.

Generally speaking, therefore respondents who reported having been bullied had lower self-esteem, poorer well-being, and scored as more depressed than those who



did not report they had been bullied, but while these are significant mean differences, they are small differences and the range of scores showed considerable overlap on all three measures.

### Psychometric test results and Help Seeking

There was no relationship between whether respondents sought help for bullying and their scores on the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale and the WHO-5 Well-being Index (WHO-5). Help seeking did not predict self-esteem or well-being scores of our respondents. However, on the Major Depression Inventory (MDI), respondents who sought help after being bullied scored higher (more depressed) than those who did not. It is impossible to say whether this is because respondents became more depressed after they sought help or sought help because they were more depressed, but the finding suggests effects in the long run, even though respondents tended to report that they thought seeking help was a benefit at the time (see Figure 2).

### Comparison by Education level

95.7% of our respondents had completed at least their Secondary school education, see Table 5 for the breakdown. Of the 159 respondents who did not complete their Post-secondary school education, 12 (7.5%) of them reported that being bullied had led them to decide not furthering their studies. There was no association found between victimised respondents and their highest education level attained, compared to respondents who were not bullied.

Bullying aside, respondents who had completed university education ( $M = 20.3$ ,  $SD = 3.3$ ) were found to have significantly higher self-esteem than those who had a complete Primary ( $M = 18.1$ ,  $SD = 2.8$ ) or Secondary ( $M = 18.9$ ,  $SD = 3.5$ ) school education. There was no difference found for comparisons of other education levels. Respondents' education levels, however, did not have an effect on their well-being and depression.

Highest Education Level Attained	No. of respondents
Completed up to Primary only	26 4.3%
Completed Secondary but not Post-secondary	133 22.2%
Completed Post-secondary	275 45.8%
Completed University	166 27.7%
Total	600 100%

Table 5. Number of respondents with regards to their highest education level attained. Post-secondary refers to institutions such as Junior College, Polytechnic, Institute of Technical Education (ITE), Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA), Lasalle and Shatec.

### **Results of qualitative questions**

Respondents provided suggestions on how the bullying they had witnessed or experienced during their school days could have been reduced or prevented. Some recommended keeping a low profile at all times while others advised avoiding or ignoring the bully whenever possible. Help seeking was the most common method put forward by the respondents. Possible sources proposed include teachers and parents. A small number of the respondents suggested fighting back or becoming a bully to curb being bullied, while a less aggressive way recommended was to stand up to the bully and not be intimidated. Besides seeking help, a big portion of the respondents advocated having more friends around, socialising more in school and not isolating oneself.

Educating and counselling of bullies, victims and the parents of both on bullying was something which some respondents felt was lacking during their days in school. In fact, respondents felt that the responsibility should fall under school authorities. Schools should have in place a set of anti-bullying programs to fight bullying, they felt. Furthermore, schools should also have more group outings and activities in school to increase interactions between students. Teachers should be better trained to keep a lookout for any sign of bullying and intervene before it escalated to something worse. In addition, they should work more closely with the parents, who themselves should have gotten more involved with their children's daily school life and activities. Attending dialogue sessions with teachers was one of the suggestions given on this point.

Finally, respondents provided us details of how they managed to evade being bullied during their school days. The avoiding and ignoring technique was the most frequently mentioned. Seeking help from teachers or parents was also common amongst respondents. Some also claimed positive returns when they stood up to the bully or fought back when faced with a potential bullying attack. Keeping a low profile was a less reported suggestion and it turned out to be less commonly used to evade bullying as well. Other successful approaches which were similar to the suggestions given were being nice and friendly to others and having friends as company wherever they go.

Although there were some who suggested becoming a bully to ward off bullying, it was not a ridiculous suggestion. The truth was that there were some who actually reported it as an effective method. On closer examination, we found that of seven respondents who suggested being a bully, three were themselves bullies. Eleven out of fifteen of those who reported becoming bullies had also described themselves as victims of bullying. This would have made them bully-victims instead of simply victims of bullying. This phenomenon of bully-victims might bear further enquiry.

## CHAPTER 4

### Discussion

#### Design of the survey

This was a retrospective study on the recollection of bullying experiences in schools. Such studies relied on the accuracy and reliability of respondents' memory. Rigby (2003) argued that memories of bullying events might have been influenced and distorted by the respondents' mood. He believed that negative feelings of being sad or angry might lead respondents to associate such unpleasant memories with being bullied. The result could be a misleading correlation between, for example, being victimised and suffering from depression.

However, Smith *et al.* (2003) pointed out studies by Dan Olweus (1993b) who found a rather accurate recall of victimisation at age 16 from respondents when they were 23 years old and Rivers (2001) who found that respondents had a good reliability in recalling the same bullying experiences twice between a year or more apart. Another study found that respondents' recollection of salient factual details of their childhood experiences were rather accurate and stable when compared with independent sources (Brewin, Andrews & Gotlib, 1993 as cited by Smith *et al.*, 2003). But Smith *et al.* reported that Berscheid's (1994) study found that although unexpected events which were emotion-provoking and affected respondents' well-being were clearly remembered, the exact time the event occurred or sequence of the event recalled were less precise.

It is inherent in retrospective studies that no prior measurement can be taken at the time, nor is it usually practicable to cross-check respondents' recollections against those of their contemporaries. For these reasons, we have to rely only on the recollections of respondents and this study is of the relationship between their perceptions and measured outcomes. It is not a study grounded in an objective assessment of those perceptions.

#### Defining bullying

Unlike the previous bullying survey by Koh and Tan (2008) where bullying was predefined, participants themselves determined whether they perceived themselves as victims of bullying, and were grouped accordingly. The important predictor variable in this study was whether or not people perceived themselves as having been bullied. We could then compare respondents' subjective perception of being bullied with their scores on objective tests. Respondents were, however, told that bullying was a repeated and intentional attempt by others meant to cause harm or distress to their daily lives. This was so that they knew we did not regard bullying as including occasional incidents, or incidents which were not deliberate attempts by the perpetrator to harm the respondents. It was hoped that this would result in some comparability with the earlier surveys.

Given this limitation, bullying prevalence in this study did appear to be similar to that in the previous studies. But because the method by which bullying was determined

was different between the studies, results of statistical analyses would not be meaningful. Inspection of the results, however, suggests that the definition used in the previous studies coincided with respondents' experiences of bullying of the current one.

### **Respondents in the survey**

Unlike some studies elsewhere where older respondents were involved (Kidscape, 1999; Lund *et al.*, 2008), this study sought out younger adults. This was because the dynamics of the education system have changed over the years. School authorities had more discretion in disciplinary measures in the past. The parent-child ratio has also decreased noticeably over the decades. Language employed for delivering knowledge has also changed. Therefore, looking at young adults would have more relevance when it comes to implications for schools today.

The particular age group of 25 – 29 years old was identified as they have been away from primary and secondary school education for some time. Thus, whatever effect we find in the results of the study is a reasonably long term effect. Another reason for selecting respondents from this age group was to ensure male respondents had completed their National Service (NS). For some, this can be a traumatic period and scores on psychometric scales might otherwise have been reflecting its impact. There could also be a possibility that NS may have an effect on male respondents' responses even after they have completed it. However, results from psychometric tests showed no difference between genders. Given that female respondents did not do NS, it can be concluded that any effects of NS on male respondents' results were minimal.

Respondents' age aside, findings from this survey seemed to replicate Lund *et al.*'s (2008) study, where respondents who recalled being bullied during their school days were significantly more depressed than those who were not, when measured on the MDI.

### **Perceived long term effects of bullying by respondents**

When we asked respondents if they felt the bullying still affected them, only five respondents reported so. Their details are given in appendix A, Table A7. However, we do not know for certain if this was due to the unwillingness of respondents to divulge the truth or if they felt that they had coped well with the bullying and were doing fine in their lives today. It could also be possible that they were affected in some way but were simply unaware of it.

### **Gender and Ethnicity differences in bullying prevalence and bullying types**

Male and female respondents were both found to be just as likely to be bullied, suggesting no gender effect. In a multi-racial society like Singapore, promoting racial harmony is an important way to preserve the peace and unity between ethnic groups. It has always been a constant challenge for one to assimilate into the population given the diverse ethnic and cultural differences. Here, Malays were found to be bullied more often when compared to Chinese, but we do not know if Malays were

bullied more often by other races, or bullied each other more. This result is similar to what was reported on the secondary school survey.

In this survey, we looked at the different forms of bullying respondents experienced during their primary and secondary school days (see Chapter 3, Table 2). Respondents generally encountered some form of physical, verbal and relational forms of bullying. The effect of cyber-bullying was not considered because widespread use of the internet and accessibility to mobile phones was in its infancy at the time.

Frequency of being bullied reported varied from daily to seldom. Male respondents were more often the subject of physical form of bullying and one form of verbal bullying as compared to female respondents (see Chapter 3, Tables 3 and 4). No other gender difference was found in other forms of verbal bullying and relational forms of bullying. No ethnic difference was found for all the different forms of bullying when comparing them against the frequency of bullying experienced. However, scores on depression revealed a medium positive relationship for relational form of bullying involving group exclusion and manipulating of friendships. Respondents who were bullied in this kind of relational bullying tend to have higher ratings on depression severity. That is, to the extent that cause and effect can be assumed, bullying that is social rather than physical carries greater risk of longer term depression.

In the survey, we only concentrated on the intensity of each type bullying but not at duration. Duration of bullying may have an effect on the respondents, possibly affecting respondents differently as Sharp, Thompson and Arora (2000) found respondents in their study reporting an increase in bullying intensity as the duration of bullying increases. The authors also found results which suggested that there might be a relationship between the type of bullying experienced and its duration. Thus, the possibility of prolonged exposure to bullying leading to differences in self-esteem, well-being and depression scores between the bullied and not bullied respondents cannot be ruled out. For example, the intensity of bullying did not suggest any difference across ethnic groups in this survey. But if the duration of bullying has an effect on them, we might find a difference on their psychometric test results.

### **Seeking help for bullying**

The frequency of help seeking was found to be low among bullied respondents although help effectiveness outcomes were found to be rather encouraging. We asked respondents to report whatever first came to their mind as it would probably reflect the most salient episode(s). This might give us a better picture of who, respondents in general, prefer to seek help from.

Bullied respondents tended to seek help from their teachers and parents more frequently than other sources. One possible reason could have been availability, authority, or the frequent contact time these two groups of people have with the children. Powers and Cohen (2004) mentioned that studies have suggested that some

children do not seek help because they believed that teachers would not be able to intervene effectively or they might not help at all. Also, victims fear that help seeking might make things worse, fear that they would not be believed, felt that nothing will be changed after seeking help and do not want to let their parents worry about it. Since teachers and parents were often seen as effective by respondents, education effort on school bullying should also focus on them.

This does not of course imply that without more ado children should simply be encouraged to approach teachers and parent whenever bullied. Unsympathetic teachers or insensitive parents may not be good sources of support. The implication of our findings is that there is good potential to develop an informed role for teachers and parents in dealing with cases of bullied children in accordance with the circumstances of each case. Attention needs to be paid to how best teachers and parents can discharge a helping role. Japanese schools have been reported to be suppressing the reporting of actual bullying figures so that government will not list them as a problem school and to avoid having the school's reputation tarnished (Straits Times, 6 December 2006). In such circumstances, students who report bullying to teachers might be ignored and seeking help would definitely not improve the situation. By recognising that bullying could be a potential problem, prevention and interventions could be promptly implemented.

### **Psychometric test results**

Findings of a relationship between reporting being bullied and long-term psychological health may lead the general public to believe that bullying is sure to have a long-term impact on children. Rigby (2003) cautioned that findings from such retrospective studies could only provide evidence of correlations or associations rather than direct evidence of causation. He proposed that the association between low self-esteem and being bullied, for example, could also be due to children with low self-esteem attracting bullies instead. He also mentioned about the possibility of a bidirectional effect where low self-esteem people gets bullied which further lowered their self-esteem.

Although there is a *prima facie* case for supposing that being bullied result in long term effects in the current study, it is possible that those lacking in self esteem or were prone to depressive symptoms were also apt to be bullied, and that being bullied was at least partly a consequence of the kind of child they were, or of the wider experience of childhood that they went through. This is consistent with the finding that almost none of the sample actually claimed their bullying experience had affected them. It may have been that lower self esteem or well-being might have arisen from other causes which in turn were also associated with bullying. On the other hand, the general conclusion from prospective studies elsewhere appears to be that there are long term effects, and it is quite possible that this is true in Singapore also.

Self-esteem scores and well-being scores did not differ between respondents who sought help and those who did not. But respondents who sought help were discovered to have higher depression scores than those who did not. Why this is so is unclear. It is suggested that maybe whatever help that was sought was not effective in alleviating subsequent depression symptoms. It is also possible that they were less able to handle the bullying in the first place and thus sought help for it. These possibilities are not mutually exclusive. But given that a majority of respondents reported that seeking help alleviated the bullying problem, it could be that respondents who scored higher in depression ratings were, in fact, more susceptible to suffer depressive symptoms in the first place. It is also possible that despite seeking help, and finding it useful at the time, longer term effects manifest themselves nevertheless. It is important to keep in mind that the help given by counselling was given at the time when bullying was experienced whereas this study is measuring long term relationships between bullying and measures of personal well-being.

### **Educational levels of respondents**

Sharp *et al.* (2000) found that long-term, high frequency bullying was likely to have major effects on the victim in terms of negative stress effects and interference in educational progress. However, we did not see the latter effect in our sample of respondents. We found no evidence that highest education level attained by respondents was related to bullying. Moreover, most respondents did not feel that bullying had affected their desire to seek education. Only a small percentage reported dropping out of school because they could not tolerate the bullying.

### **Respondents' feedbacks**

Responses to suggestions to reduce bullying and recollection of situations where respondents avoided getting bullied revealed some similarity. Ideas mentioned by respondents included avoid/ignore, keeping low profile, standing up to the bully and seeking help. These ideas were, in fact, employed successfully by some of the respondents, showing that such techniques can be useful in averting bullying. A majority of the respondents recommended seeking help for bullying while most of them who managed to escape from a potential bullying attack reported using the avoid/ignore technique to accomplish it.

Common sense suggests that the best technique depends on the circumstances a victim is in.

About a tenth of the suggestions advised ignoring or avoiding the bullies whenever possible to curb the chances of becoming a victim. One study reported by Smith *et al.* (2003) found that ignoring was the most commonly employed method by their respondents. As it turned out, this method was the most frequently used technique in our sample as well consisting of more than one-third of the responses. The possible success of such methods might be a result of bullies losing interest in the victims. Failure to elicit a reaction or response from a target might lead the bullies to search for other

potential victims. However we do not know if the respondents in our study who successfully employed such methods were subsequently bullied again, making the incident a one-off success. Hunter *et al.* (2004) found that coping strategies which deal with the problem "actively" yielded more success in preventing further bullying than "passive" methods. "Active" strategies which the authors mentioned included "talking to the bully", "ignoring the bully" and "getting help". They explained that "ignoring the bully" was considered an "active" method because the victims were actively dealing with the problem by showing the bullies that they were not affected by their actions. "Passive" methods like avoiding the bullies, however, did not help in alleviating the situation as the victim did not "deal" with the bullying. Furthermore, the authors found that aggressive strategies like "fighting back" or nonchalant attitude like "making fun of the bullying incident" were the least effective. They believed that since victims were usually targeted because they were considered to be weaker than the bullies, fighting back would not bear much success, whereas making fun of the bullying incident could either provoke the bullies further or lead them to think that the victims did not mind.

Being nice and friendly, having friends around or gaining more friends was a common suggestion given by the respondents. Although it accounted for less than ten percent of the successful methods used, respondents felt that they warded off bullying because of friends around them. As it might be easier for bullies to target individuals, being in a group makes it trickier for bullies to carry out their attacks. In addition, studies had found that having friends is a good social buffer of the effects of bullying on top of preventing bullying (Powers & Cohen, 2004; Sharp *et al.*, 2000).

The suggestion by some respondents that teachers and schools could have played a vital role in bully prevention was something which has been raised in Parliament. Questions have been raised with regards to whether teachers in our local schools are well-trained to handle bullying incidents (Today, 22 January 2008). Proposals discussed in Parliament included providing teachers with more training to help them identify and deal with bullying and getting schools to work with Non Governmental Organisations.

Research elsewhere have suggested that teachers' reports of children whom they considered to be victimised frequently are a strong predictor of psychiatric disorders later in the child's life (Rønning *et al.*, 2008). The study by Rønning *et al.* looked at cross-informant agreement between teachers, parents and children on how frequent a child was bullied or had bullied others. Children were found to report being "victimised frequently", more often than teachers and parents. On the other hand, teachers were found to identify "frequent bullying" by bullies more regularly than parents and the bullies themselves. The authors believed that the low reporting rate of bullying by the bullies might not be due to them not perceiving their actions as bullying. In addition, teachers could not only observe children's social and academic competence, along with their disruptive behaviours, but were also able to make comparisons between



other children at the same developmental levels. This would allow them to identify bullying more readily and more accurately.

But there are bound to be differences in perception of bullying between teachers which will have an impact on the decision made (Homel, 2007). For example, what is and what is not considered bullying by a teacher affects any decision to take appropriate action against a child for performing a negative act on another child. The setting in which a bullying incident occurred would also play an important role as well in determining if there would be interference from the teacher to end the transgression. Thus, teachers need to be trained to accurately identify bullying incidents. According to Homel (2007), schools themselves should not be tempted to dismiss bullying as something transitory and not requiring intervention but should actively raise the awareness among students, teachers and parents.

As of 2008, every primary and secondary school in Singapore would have at least one Full-time School Counsellor (FTSC) assigned to it (Ministry of Education, 2008). The Ministry of Education (MOE) has planned to increase the numbers at 70 schools with an additional FTSC and an Operations Manager (OM) each. The job of the FTSC is to provide students with guidance and counselling while the OM's focus is on students deemed to be at-risk. The OM's job is to get these at-risk students involved in more school activities to enrich their school lives. The appointment of FTSCs would provide students with an additional venue to seek help for bullying related issues, endorsing the sentiments of the majority of our respondents. FTSC and OM could also assist the teaching staff to spot signs of bullying. Hopefully, the support given to bullies and victims by these professionals would mitigate any ill effects of bullying, but in view of the relationship between seeking help and longer term depression scores, particular attention might need to be paid to victims of relational bullying.

The effectiveness of existing FTSC programs still need attention. A survey carried out found that students do not trust school counsellors when it came to the issue of confidentiality (Today, 15 October 2009). The stigma that came with counselling also deterred students from approaching FTSCs. In addition, news reports suggest that teens prefer to text and chat online rather than call a helpline to seek help (Straits Times, 31 August 2009). An article in the Straits Times asked teens about their views on helplines (14 September 2009). Some felt that such helplines should be actively advertised on TV, like in Australia, as the level of awareness is low. Others felt uncomfortable talking to a stranger. Being stigmatised for seeking help was also one of the reasons reported. Thus, more could be done to explore alternative avenues or to review existing procedures for students to seek help, and to encourage them to do so.

Respondents' suggestion of having more group activities in schools for students might have increased relevance in the age of Information Technology. Should children become more obsessed with the use of electronic gadgets, it is possible that they could start to lose touch with the real world. Too much time spent in the cyber world

could lead to fewer opportunities for children to hone their social skills. They also do not have the benefit of reading non-verbal cues to help them empathise with their interlocutors. This could lead to potential conflicts and misunderstanding. Creating opportunities for children to interact with others face to face allow them to better appreciate individual differences between people and develop better tolerance of cultural and gender differences.

In social networking sites like Facebook or Friendster, children may try to add strangers to their list of "friends" as a mark of popularity. This could make them more susceptible to cyber-bullying given that they do not know these strangers well enough. Parents' role in supervising internet and mobile phone usage by their children should be regarded as central to protect their children's cyber-wellbeing. This is especially so as some respondents indicated that the level of involvement parents have in their children's daily lives was questionable.

Indeed, one recent study found that the more time children spend in front of a computer or television, the less attached they are to their family and peers (Richards, McGee, Williams, Welch & Hancox, 2010). The study reported that children who have a television set in their own rooms would spend more time eating in their rooms, thereby further reducing interaction time between family members. From another angle, studies have shown that children who received both emotional support and cognitive stimulation from their parents were less inclined to bully others in schools (Zimmerman, Glew, Christakis & Katon, 2005; Barboza *et al.*, 2009). The studies also found that as the amount of television watching increases, the more predisposed they are to become a bully.

A similar situation can be found here in Singapore. As the standard of living gets higher, parents spend more time working to keep up with their lifestyle. Coming home late could mean leaving the children unsupervised. This could lead to children spending more time on television watching and even less time for children to interact with their parents. What's more, it is not uncommon to see many families nowadays having more than one television set and one computer in their households. Many families have also switched to using mobile phones, doing away with a fixed home phone line (Straits Times, 4 January 2010). Without the need to fight over the use of a phone and no need to speak in front of others, supervision on who children talk to could be difficult.

Attention should also be given to bullies as well. Studies suggest that bullies may suffer from low level of security, lack problem solving skills and lack interest in school life (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). Some studies suggested that the parenting style received by the bullies may be a contributing factor (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005; Connolly *et al.*, 2000 as cited by Homel, 2007). Parents who discipline their children with violence could mislead them into believing that violence is a means to solve problems. One study found that bullies in their sample tend to communicate less with their parents (Berthold & Hoover, 2000).

A mother, who recently sued two primary school students for bullying her son, was seen as being excessive and overreacting by some members of the public (Asiaone, 1 March 2010; New Paper, 4 March 2010a & b). It was reported that the incident led to a lot of distress for the bullies' parents. The article also quoted a principal who highlighted that most bullying cases were resolved when parents on both sides sat down with the school to resolve the problem. When both parties meet up to tackle the problem, it would lead to a better resolution of the problem. This shows that the roles which parents and the school play in the students' school lives are important in reducing bullying.

There are many Non-profit organisations in Singapore which have anti-bullying programs to educate and advise families and schools on fighting against bullying. Agencies like B4USURF, Touch community, CABCY and Singapore Children's Society's Bully-free Campaign act as a bridge to link up the schools, students and families to foster better relationships. At times, such agencies also take on bullying cases and assist the schools to resolve the problem with the affected families. Such involvement by the agencies would play a vital role in ensuring that the three areas of focus (School, Parents and Children) to curb bullying are working in tandem.

## CHAPTER 5

### Conclusion

Results from this study have shown that there is some cause for concern when it comes to the possible long-term effects bullying has on our children. Though some research (Pellegrini & Long, 2002) showed that bullying tends to decrease as children grew older, the victims differ from others who were not bullied years after it is over. Whether or not the relationship is in fact a causal one, a precautionary approach would suggest that any possible negative impact of school bullying on adults should mandate that interventions start when they are still young. By cultivating the belief in children that bullying is wrong, proper behaviour could be nurtured.

Education could aid in stressing the importance of seeking help when bullying occurs and further allay the effects of bullying. Researchers have advocated adopting an early intervention policy on both bully and victim by introducing anti-bullying programs to reduce the risk of psychiatric disorder in adulthood (Connolly, Pepler, Craig & Taradash, 2000; Rønning *et al.*, 2008; Sharp *et al.*, 2000). Some researchers have promoted Olweus' whole school approach, where the three aspects of School, Parents and Students are targeted and worked on simultaneously (Powers & Cohen, 2004; Sharp, *et al.*, 2000). This means that school, parents and students must work simultaneously to successfully tackle this issue. Simply focusing on one aspect would not be as effective.

Homel (2007) mentioned that some believed that people would gain more freedom once they left school and enter adulthood. In theory, these adults should be able to exercise greater control over their choice of environment and people to interact with. But "bullying can occur in any environment where people interact for periods of time, particularly social institutions characterised by hierarchical structures with opportunities for individuals to abuse power" (Homel, 2007, p. 175). There have been studies which showed that duration of bullying is rather stable (Carlisle & Rofes, 2007). This means that once students were bullied, they would continue to be bullied. Persistent bullying which had continued for some time was found to be fairly hard to stop (Sharp *et al.*, 2000). Without intervention, victims will continue to suffer bullying for a long time.

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## APPENDIX A

### Supplementary results

This appendix gives supplementary results and statistical analysis in more detail than is feasible in the main body of the report.

#### Demographic variables:

##### Housing type of respondents

Housing types	Number of households	Percentage
HDB 1 – 3 rm	127	21.2%
HDB 4 rm	240	40.0%
HDB 5 rm + Executive	164	27.3%
Private Housing	69	11.5%
Total	600	100%

Table A1. Breakdown of the type of household sampled. Note Executive refers to HDB Executive Condominiums and Maisonettes while Private housing consisted of private apartments, condominiums and landed properties.

##### Gender and Ethnicity

	Not Bullied			Bullied			Grand Total
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
Chinese	111 18.5%	115 19.2%	226 37.7%	97 16.2%	115 19.2%	212 35.3%	438 73.0%
Malays	19 3.2%	17 2.8%	36 6.0%	35 5.8%	22 3.7%	57 9.5%	93 15.5%
Indians	16 2.7%	13 2.2%	29 4.8%	10 1.7%	13 2.2%	23 3.8%	52 8.7%
Others	1 0.2%	7 1.2%	8 1.3%	4 0.7%	5 0.8%	9 1.5%	17 2.8%
Total	147 24.6%	152 25.4%	299 49.8%	146 24.4%	155 25.9%	301 50.1%	600 100%

Table A2. Bullied and Not Bullied respondents broken down by Gender and Ethnicity.

A chi-square test of goodness-of-fit showed that gender distribution did not differ significantly from the population ratio of 1268:1364 (M:F),  $\chi^2(1, N= 600) = 0.1, p > .05$ .

A chi-square test of goodness-of-fit showed that the distribution of racial categories in the sample did not differ significantly from that of the population, in which the proportions are 74% Chinese, 13% Malays, 10% Indians, 3% Others,  $\chi^2(3, N= 600) = 4.28, p > .05$ .

Population proportions for Gender and Ethnicity were obtained from the Yearbook of Statistics Singapore (Department of Statistics, 2009).

These analyses confirmed that the study sample acquired was representative of Singapore's young adult population.

### **Bullying by Gender**

A chi-square test of independence between the Bullied and Not Bullied for Gender,  $\chi^2(1, N= 600) = 0.01, p > .05$ , revealed no evidence to suggest that one gender was more susceptible to bullying than the other. As is also obvious from inspection, both male and female respondents were just as likely to be bullied.

	Male	Female	Total
Bullied	146 48.5%	155 51.5%	301 100%
Not Bullied	147 49.2%	152 50.8%	299 100%

Table A3. Number of respondents in the Bullied and Not Bullied groups by gender.

### **Bullying by Ethnicity**

	Chinese	Malays	Indians	Others
Bullied	212 48.4%	57 61.3%	23 44.2%	9 52.9%
Not Bullied	226 51.6%	36 38.7%	29 55.8%	8 47.1%
Total	438 100%	93 100%	52 100%	17 100%

Table A4. Number of respondents in the Bullied and Not Bullied groups by ethnicity.

A chi-square test of independence between Bullied and Not Bullied group by Ethnicity found no significant difference in the prevalence of bullying across the different ethnic groups,  $\chi^2(3, N = 600) = 5.93, p = .11$ . Although this technically suggests one cannot reject a null hypothesis of no relation between ethnic group and reporting being bullied, the figure approaches significance and looking at the percentages in Table A4, we can see that 61.3% of Malay respondents were bullied as compared to 44.2% of Indian and 48.4% of Chinese respondents. Pairwise analyses of the three major ethnic groups were therefore conducted. The comparison between Chinese and Malays revealed a significant difference,  $\chi^2(1, N = 531) = 4.60, p < .05$ . A significantly higher proportion of Malays (61.3%) than Chinese (48.4%) reported being bullied. The comparison between Malays and Indians does not quite reach significance,  $\chi^2(1, N = 145) = 3.27, p > .05$ , but the pattern is similar, with a higher proportion of Malays (61.3%) than Indians (44.2%) reported being bullied. There is clearly no significant difference between Chinese (48.4%) and Indians (44.2%). Here and elsewhere, all 2x2 chi-square tests are using Yates correction for continuity.

This data lead to the conclusion that Malays were more often reporting being the victims of school bullying as compared to the Chinese and to some extent, compared to the Indians as well.

### Comparing the different forms of bullying by Gender and Ethnicity

Question 4 of the questionnaire asked respondents who reported being bullied about the type of bullying they had encountered during their school days. The question consisted of seven common types of bullying actions. Respondents had the option to report more types of bullying other than the seven listed in the question under "Others". In the end, results for "Others" yielded only three cases and were not analysed due to the small figures.

A chi-square test of goodness-of-fit was performed for each of the seven forms of bullying within the bullied sample to find out if gender (Table A5) and ethnicity (Table A6) varied in their association with bullying. The observed number of each group was the number of respondents indicating that they had been bullied in the manner indicated, regardless of how frequently. Respondents could indicate more than one type of bullying, and the observed numbers for each form of bullying varied.

Types of bullying	Chi-square test results	Number of respondents	
		Male	Female
Been pushed around or beaten by others	$\chi^2(1, N= 217) = 4.57, p < .05^*$	121	96
Received threats of harm, intimidation or hostile gestures towards you	$\chi^2(1, N= 222) = 4.23, p < .05^*$	123	99
Been taunted, scolded or had vulgarities hurled at you	$\chi^2(1, N= 252) = 3.01, p = ns$	136	116
Been teased about something or received sarcasm in a malicious or cruel way	$\chi^2(1, N= 254) = 0.36, p = ns$	128	126
Been called nasty names or received degrading comments about you	$\chi^2(1, N= 256) = 0.23, p = ns$	128	128
Suffered from group exclusion or the dissolving/manipulating of friendships	$\chi^2(1, N= 225) = 0.67, p = ns$	103	122
Had people spread nasty rumours or gossiped something bad about you	$\chi^2(1, N= 251) = 0.36, p = ns$	117	134

Table A5. Results of chi-square test of goodness-of-fit for each type of bullying by gender.

Types of bullying	Chi-square test results	Number of respondents			
		C	M	I	O
Been pushed around or beaten by others	$\chi^2(1, N= 217) = 1.53, p = ns$	158	38	13	8
Received threats of harm, intimidation or hostile gestures towards you	$\chi^2(1, N= 222) = 0.77, p = ns$	161	40	14	7
Been taunted, scolded or had vulgarities hurled at you	$\chi^2(1, N= 252) = 0.27, p = ns$	175	49	21	7
Been teased about something or received sarcasm in a malicious or cruel way	$\chi^2(1, N= 254) = 0.17, p = ns$	181	47	18	8
Been called nasty names or received degrading comments about you	$\chi^2(1, N= 256) = 0.16, p = ns$	183	47	19	7
Suffered from group exclusion or the dissolving/manipulating of friendships	$\chi^2(1, N= 225) = 0.72, p = ns$	162	40	18	5
Had people spread nasty rumours or gossiped something bad about you	$\chi^2(1, N= 251) = 1.10, p = ns$	184	43	18	6

Table A6. Results of chi-square test of goodness-of-fit for each type of bullying by ethnicity. No type of bullying yielded any significant difference between the ethnic groups.

### Conclusion

Significant differences between genders were found for physical bullying, “Being pushed around or beaten by others”, and one form of verbal bullying, “Received threats of harm, intimidation or hostile gestures towards you”. Male respondents were more vulnerable than female respondents in both instances. Besides that, there was no significant gender difference in other forms of verbal bullying and any of the relational form of bullying. Significant difference was found for none of the different forms of bullying when comparing between ethnic groups. There was no evidence to suggest that any particular race was more prone to certain forms of bullying.

### **Bullied and Affected group**

The great majority of the 301 respondents who reported that they were bullied in schools felt that it no longer affected them. However, five respondents claimed to be affected by the bullying. Table A7 shows their results.

	Respondent				
	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5
Trouble forming or maintaining relationships or friendships					X
Shy or afraid to meet new people	X	X			X
Depressed or long periods of sadness		X		X	X
Easily Anxious or nervous			X	X	X
Easily frustrated or short-tempered	X		X	X	X
Feelings of being vulnerable		X	X	X	X
Lowered self-esteem or self-worth or self-confidence	X	X	X	X	X
Feelings of being insecure or lack of confidence or self-doubt	X	X	X	X	X

Table A7. Problems attributed to past school bullying experience by five respondents claiming to have been affected by past bullying experience. Crosses (X) indicate that respondents claimed they were affected in that manner given (e.g., Respondent #1 reported no trouble with forming or maintaining relationship, yet was shy or afraid to meet new people, and so on down column #1).

With such a small number of respondents, one cannot extrapolate to the general population, especially in view of the 296 bullied respondents reporting no lasting effect. It is possible that these 296 respondents were unaware of the effects, or preferred to deny them, but it is more reasonable to suppose that Table A7 reflects unique results for a very small minority of particularly vulnerable or badly affected bullied individuals.

### **Help seeking and its perceived effectiveness**

Of the Bullied respondents, 113/301 (37.5%) sought help when bullied. And out of those 113, 45 (39.8%) sought more than one source of help. From Table A8, we can see that more than half of these respondents reported that seeking help alleviated the bullying situation. Very few felt that seeking help made the situation worse. This suggests that seeking help when bullied is more often than not, a positive thing to do.

	Help #1	Help #2
Better	66 58.4%	33 71.1%
No Change	38 33.6%	7 15.6%
Worse	9 8%	6 13.3%
Total	113 100%	45 100%

Table A8. Results reported by Bullied respondents after seeking help.

### Source of help respondents sought

Respondents sought help from different sources, categorised into four groups (see Table A9). *Family* refers to parents and siblings. *School* consists of teachers, discipline masters and headmasters. *Peers* include friends and classmates. The rest of the sources of help are grouped under *Others*. Sources of help sought from *Others* consisted of social workers or counsellors, maids and even getting another bully to resolve the problem.

	Better	Worse	No Change	Total
School	38 63.3%	5 8.3%	17 28.3%	60 100%
Family	34 60.7%	2 3.6%	20 35.7%	56 100%
Peers	22 62.9%	7 20.0%	6 17.1%	35 100%
Others	4 57.1%	1 14.3%	2 28.6%	7 100%

Table A9. Results of help seeking reported by Bullied respondents, broken down into different sources. Note that both sources indicated by respondents of help were combined and tabulated together.

As seen in Table A9, each of the four categories showed that more than half of the respondents reported experiencing a better outcome after seeking help. By and large, it would seem that no matter whom respondents preferred to seek help from, the situation tended to improve more than half of the time. *School* (38.0%) and *Family* (35.4%) formed the bulk of sources respondents searched for when bullied.

### Psychometric test results

Three types of psychometric tests were used to compare between the Bullied and Not Bullied group. Scores on the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSES), the WHO-5 Well-being Index (WHO-5) and the Major Depression Inventory (MDI) were collected and



tabulated for every respondent and their mean scores compared. Cohen's *d* effect size on the three psychometric tests between the Bullied and Not Bullied groups were calculated as well. The results can be found in Table A10.

	Bullied (N = 301)		Not Bullied (N = 299)		Student's <i>t</i> -test	Effect Size
	M	SD	M	SD	<i>t</i> (598)	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale	19.01	3.75	20.31	3.17	4.61***	- 0.37
WHO-5 Well-being Index	15.66	4.25	17.18	4.20	4.39***	- 0.36
Major Depression Inventory	12.82	7.46	9.98	7.07	4.78***	0.39

Table A10. Independent sample *t*-test results of each psychometric test between Bullied and Not Bullied group and its respective effect size. (\*\*\*) indicates  $p < .001$ . Note medium effect size for all three psychometric tests between Bullied and Not Bullied group.

WHO-5	Bullied	Not Bullied
Good well-being	233 77.4%	260 87.0%
Poor well-being	68 22.6%	39 13.0%
Total	301 100%	299 100%

Table A11. Breakdown of Bullied and Not Bullied respondents based on level of well-being. Note a score below 13 in the WHO-5 is classified as reflecting poor well-being while scores of 13 or more are considered to indicate good well-being.

From Table A11, we can easily see that the Bullied group has fewer respondents belonging to the Good Well-being category, and more in the Poor Well-being category. A chi-square test of independence showed that the association was between being bullied and classified as Poor on Well-being is significant,  $\chi^2(1, N = 600) = 8.69, p < .01$ .

MDI	Bullied	Not Bullied
No Depression	247 82.1%	271 90.6%
Mild Depression	31 10.3%	17 5.7%
Moderate Depression	13 4.3%	5 1.7%
Severe Depression	10 3.3%	6 2.0%
Total	301 100%	299 100%

Table A12. Breakdown of Bullied and Not Bullied respondents based on depression level.

The MDI has a grading system to measure the severity of depression whereby scores of 0-19 are classified as reflecting no depression. Scores of the MDI between 20 and 24 are considered as reflecting Mild symptoms. Scores in the range of 25-29 are categorised as Moderate levels of depression. Finally, scores of respondents from 30 to the maximum of 50 are diagnosed as having Severe depression.

Table A12 shows the number of respondents in each severity level of depression. We can see that there were more respondents in the Severe, Moderate and Mild categories for the Bullied than the Not Bullied group. The percentage of respondents who were categorised as having no depression was also lower in the Bullied group than the Not Bullied group. The numbers in the Moderate and Severe categories are rather low, but if these categories are pooled for analysis (yielding 23 Bullied subjects and 11 Not Bullied subjects in the Moderate or Severe categories), then a chi-square test of independence shows that the association between level of depression and reported history of bullying is significant,  $\chi^2(2, N= 600) = 8.1, p < .05$ .

### Conclusion

On the whole, respondents who belonged to the Bullied group had lower self-esteem and poorer well-being on average and were considered to be more depressed than those who belonged to the Not Bullied group.

### **Comparison of seeking help for bullying by Gender and Ethnicity**

A chi-sq test of independence carried out on Help Seeking as a function of Gender did not show a significant difference,  $\chi^2(1, N = 301) = 0.04, p > .05$ . Male and Female respondents in our sample were equally likely to seek help for bullying. A chi-sq test of independence carried out did not find a any difference for the factor of Ethnicity as well,  $\chi^2(3, N = 301) = 3.44, p > .05$ . There was no evidence that any particular ethnic group who would be more likely to seek help when bullied.

### **Psychometric test results and Help Seeking**

	Sought Help (N = 301)		Did not seek help (N = 299)		Student's t-test
	M	SD	M	SD	t (299)
Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale	19.06	3.94	18.98	3.64	0.19
WHO-5 Well-being Index	15.81	3.93	15.58	4.43	0.45
Major Depression Inventory	14.61	7.73	11.74	7.10	3.28*

Table A13. Independent samples t-test results of each psychometric test between respondents who sought help when bullied and those who did not. (\*) indicates  $p < .05$ .

## Conclusion

Whether a respondent reported seeking help when bullied did not predict his or her scores on self-esteem and well-being, see Table A13. However, respondents who have sought help were more depressed than those who did not, which is somewhat unexpected as it could imply that the help had not reversed any depressing effects. On the other hand, it might be that only the most affected respondents sought help, and they might have been even worse had they not done so.

### **Looking at possible relationships between the psychometric tests**

Comparisons were carried out to see if there were any correlations between the three psychometric tests. We wanted to find out if scores on one of the tests could predict scores on another.

	Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSES)	WHO-5 Well-being Index (WHO-5)	Major Depression Inventory (MDI)
Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale	1.00	0.46***	-0.39***
WHO-5 Well-being Index	0.46***	1.00	-0.36***
Major Depression Inventory	-0.39***	-0.36***	1.00

Table A14. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient between the three psychometric tests. Note all comparisons yield medium strength correlations. (\*\*\*) indicates  $p < .001$ .

Results from Table A14 shows that the three psychometric tests have a medium strength interrelationship in the expected direction. Characteristically, a high score on self-esteem for a respondent was generally found to predict a high score on well-being and low score on depression rating.

### **The relationship between bullying types and psychometric tests**

We combined the different intensities of each bullying into one and compared with their "Never" scores. Using the dichotomous variables for each bullying type, a bivariate correlation test was carried out on the three types of psychometric tests against the seven bullying types to see if there was any relationship between them, see Table A15.

Pearson's Correlation Coefficient (r)	RSES	WHO-5	MDI
Been pushed around or beaten by others	-0.05	-0.09	0.16
Received threats of harm, intimidation or hostile gestures towards you	0.02	-0.06	0.20
Been taunted, scolded or had vulgarities hurled at you	-0.001	-0.11	0.11
Been teased about something or received sarcasm in a malicious or cruel way	-0.08	-0.09	0.12
Been called nasty names or received degrading comments about you	-0.02	-0.13	0.14
Suffered from group exclusion or the dissolving/ manipulating of friendships	-0.13	-0.08	0.30
Had people spread nasty rumours or gossiped something bad about you	-0.11	-0.08	0.16

Table A15. Pearson's Correlation Coefficient (r) values of each type of bullying against the three psychometric tests. None of the values were significant.

Both self-esteem and well-being have shown to have at most a weak correlation across the different types of bullying. Depression showed similarly weak relationship except for group exclusion and manipulating of friendships, which displayed a medium positive relationship, but still not significant. Results showed that respondents who were bullied in this kind of relational bullying could possibly have higher scores on depression but any association seems to be a weak one.

#### Comparison of bullying by highest education level attained

There was only one respondent who reported not completing primary school education. This was pooled with the next higher level of education attained for analysis. Respondents in that level were re-categorised as having "Completed up to primary only" education in Table A16.

Highest Education Level Attained	Not Bullied	Bullied	Total
Completed up to Primary only	15 5%	11 3.7	26 4.3%
Completed Secondary but not Post-secondary	57 19.1%	76 25.2%	133 22.2%
Completed Post-secondary	136 45.5%	139 46.2%	275 45.8%
Completed University	91 30.4%	75 24.9%	166 27.7%
<b>Total</b>	299 100%	301 100%	600 100%

Table A16. Highest educational level attained by respondents broken down by bullying group. Note that Post-secondary refers to institutions providing education beyond secondary school levels like junior colleges, polytechnics, ITEs, NAFA, Lasalle and Shatec.

159 respondents in our sample completed up to secondary school education. Of these respondents who did not attain education levels beyond secondary school, only 12 respondents (7.5%) felt that bullying was a contributing factor for not continuing their education. A chi-square test of independence carried out on highest education level respondents attained between Bullied and Not Bullied group was not significant,  $\chi^2(3, N = 600) = 4.90, p > .05$ . Bullying was not found to be associated with respondents' highest education level attained. 73.5% of the bullied respondents had managed to acquire an education level which was beyond secondary school. Despite the expressed beliefs of some respondents who stopped their education after being bullied, there was no evidence to suggest that bullying affected the highest level of education attained.

Highest Education Level Attained	M	SD	ANOVA
<i>Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale</i>			F(3,596)
Completed up to Primary only	18.12	2.75	5.96*
Completed Secondary but not Post-Secondary	18.87	3.45	
Completed Post-Secondary	19.80	3.68	
Completed University	20.30	3.28	
<i>WHO-5 Well-being Index (WHO-5)</i>			F(3,596)
Completed up to Primary only	15.96	5.10	0.39
Completed Secondary but not Post-Secondary	16.73	4.36	
Completed Post-Secondary	16.31	4.28	
Completed University	16.42	4.13	
<i>Major Depression Inventory (MDI)</i>			F(3,596)
Completed up to Primary only	11.96	7.00	2.48
Completed Secondary but not Post-Secondary	12.88	8.21	
Completed Post-Secondary	10.83	6.91	
Completed University	11.10	7.46	

Table A17. One-way between groups ANOVA for the three psychometric tests by the highest education level respondents attained. (\*) indicates  $p < .05$ .

A one-way between groups ANOVA was conducted to find out if there was any difference in the psychometric tests scores for the different levels of education attained, see Table A17. Tukey's HSD Post Hoc analysis on the significant difference between the means on self-esteem scores uncovered that the difference lies between respondents who have "Completed University" education ( $M = 20.30, SD = 3.28$ ) and those who "Completed up to Primary" ( $M = 18.12, SD = 2.75$ ) and "Completed Secondary but not Post-secondary" ( $M = 18.87, SD = 3.45$ ) school education.

## Conclusion

While there was no evidence to suggest that bullying was correlated with highest education level attained, we did notice something else. Bullying aside, how far respondents studied had an effect on their self-esteem scores. Not surprisingly, a relationship was found between respondents who achieved university education and those who had acquired up to secondary school education. The group who had completed university education had, on average, higher self-esteem scores than the other group who did not.

### **Qualitative questions**

Q10 of the questionnaire asked respondents if they felt any form of help would have been useful to prevent bullying from happening back then. 413 out of the 600 respondents (68.8%) answered the question. Some respondents proposed more than one suggestion, giving a total of 470 suggestions. The results have been compiled into thirteen categories for easy reference. The figures and percentages for each category are displayed in Table A18.

- 1) *Inform, confide or talk to someone/Seek help (26.4%)* – this approach involved enlisting the help of someone, usually adults like teachers or parents, to put a stop to the bullying. A large number of respondents mentioned seeking help from teachers when bullied. This could be due to the proximity factor of teachers from whom help can be readily available. This may imply that teachers play an important role in schools when it comes to fighting bullying. Some recommended informing their parents about bullying problems. Parents could then highlight the problem to the school and resolve the bullying issue. Peers, siblings and school prefects were the other choices respondents felt victims could rely on for solving bullying matters.
- 2) *Be Friendly/Have more friends (11.7%)* – the idea here is to have friends around you and not isolate yourself. Being friendly and socialising more in school help in achieving that. Many respondents reported that with friends around, they could help each other should one of them get bullied. Respondents also drew attention to the possibility of making friends with the bullies to stop them from continuing their harassment.
- 3) *Ministry/School/Authorities (11.4%)* – respondents here felt that it should have been the responsibility of schools and the education ministry to have a set of programs, rules or regulations to curb bullying. Many were in favour of tighter disciplinary measures by school to keep bullying in check. Some felt that schools should provide counselling services to both victims and bullies. Others suggested having more counsellors or discipline teachers in each school.

- 4) *Teachers (9.4%)* – respondents here by and large felt that if teachers were able to pay more attention to students' behaviour and keep a lookout for any sign of bullying, it could have been reduced or stopped. By showing care and concern to the students, respondents believed that teachers can foster a good relationship with their students. This would encourage victims to come forward to seek help. Teachers should also work closely with parents of victims and bullies when bullying occurred.
- 5) *Avoid/Ignore (9.1%)* – this tactic is different from keeping a low profile although the underlying notion of reducing or removing contact opportunities and time spent with bullies is the same. Here respondents gave suggestions like avoiding places where they know bullies like to hang out and ignoring them when they are being called out. Snubbing the bullies' requests to join them for activities and avoiding quarrels or fights were suggested by some.
- 6) *Education (8.7%)* – the suggestion of respondents here is to educate and counsel the bullies, victims and the parents of both the bullies and victims as well. Staff from the schools (principals, teachers, prefects) needs to be educated on bullying and the effects it has on the students. Parents should learn how to handle the situation should their child fall prey to bullies or bully other children. Consequences of being a bully should be stressed to the students to deter them. Educate students by teaching them to speak up when bullied and learn what to do when faced with bullying. Role-play can be employed to coach students not to become a victim and not to bully others.
- 7) *Stand up to the bully (8.5%)* – respondents here generally felt that students should learn to be more confident in the way they carry themselves and not to show fear in the presence of bullies, believing that this would deter bullies from targeting them. When confronted by a bully, students should not just take things lying down but voice their displeasure or tell the bullies off instead. Some respondents also stressed the importance of looking bullies in the eye when standing up to them.
- 8) *Parents (4.9%)* – some of the respondents felt that parents could have played an important role in helping them cope with bullying. These respondents mentioned that parents should have shown more concern in their children's daily activities and also attend school dialogue sessions regularly to understand their children's school life better.
- 9) *Become a bully (2.6%)* – there were a few respondents who reported that a good method to reduce or foil bullying was to simply be one of them. By bullying others, they felt that it could reduce the chance of or avoid getting bullied themselves. Here, a couple of respondents mentioned things like: "if you can't beat them, then join them".

- 10) *Group outings/activities (2.3%)* – to reduce bullying in schools, some respondents held the belief that having more group outings or activities could promote more interaction between students and increase the level of bonding between them. By creating such opportunities to intermingle, for example between classes, it might lessen any misunderstandings among the students. School activities could also help to keep the students preoccupied with something meaningful and constructive.
- 11) *Keeping a low profile (1.3%)* – respondents suggested refraining from being too expressive in school and toning down one's actions in order not to attract any unwanted attention from the bullies. Some of the ways mentioned include not boasting or bragging about oneself and not to be too outspoken in school.
- 12) *Fight back/bully them back (1.3%)* – here, the suggestion to avert bullying takes a more reactive slant. Instead of using more passive methods like keeping a low profile or paying no heed to the bullies, respondents suggested dealing with it by being aggressive with the bullies. Learning martial arts for self-protection and physical fights were ways respondents cited. Some suggested tit for tat action.
- 13) *Others (2.3%)* – this consisted of suggestions which included having CCTV installed on the school premises, having a senior student as a mentor to look after the younger ones and discouraging peers from bullying others, skipping or switching schools and getting a home education.

Suggestions to stop/prevent Bullying	No. of responses	Percentage
Inform, confide or talk to someone/Seek help	124	26.4%
Be Friendly/Have more friends	55	11.7%
Ministry/School/Authorities	54	11.4%
Teachers	44	9.4%
Avoid/Ignore	43	9.1%
Education	41	8.7%
Stand up to the bully	40	8.5%
Parents	23	4.9%
Become a bully	12	2.6%
Group outings/activities	11	2.3%
Keeping a low profile	6	1.3%
Fight back/bully them back	6	1.3%
Others	11	2.3%
TOTAL	470	100%

Table A18. Figures and percentages of the 13 categories of suggestions by respondents, arranged in descending order, except for "Others".



More than a quarter of the respondents reported Seeking Help to be a good method which could have stopped or prevented bullying from happening. Keeping a Low Profile was one of the least reported suggestions. Responses from "Others" had less than five counts of similar suggestions each and were thus grouped together. We could see that there were more respondents who suggested being friendly to others and having the school authorities implement measures to curb bullying in addition to seeking help.

In Q11 of the questionnaire, respondents were asked if they had ever encountered a situation which they managed to avoid getting bullied and if so, how? 233 out of the 600 respondents (38.8%) answered this question. A total of 251 responses were collected and compiled into nine categories in Table A19.

- 1) *Avoid/Ignore (38.6%)* – as suggested by the respondents earlier, avoiding places where the bullies hang out or taking another path when one saw the bullies helped some respondents from getting bullied. Some respondents mentioned that avoiding places where they have been bullied before also helped. Simply walking away when respondents were accosted by the bullies had its benefits as the bullies would stop their harassment after some time. Several respondents shunned the bullies for company to reduce the chances of being victimised.
- 2) *Seek help/Report the bullies (13.9%)* – most of the respondents here had chosen to seek teachers' help while others approached their parents. Parents whom respondents looked to for help would either lodge a complaint with the school or work with the school to rectify the bully problem. Some sought the assistance of a senior student to stop the bullying while there was one respondent who resorted to making a police report.
- 3) *Stand up to them/Warn them (12.0%)* – some respondents reported avoiding bullying after they gave warnings to the bullies by threatening to inform the teachers or parents. Some showed confidence when confronting bullies and asked them to stop. By keeping one's composure when facing up to the bullies and not panicking, respondents found that they could thwart the bullying attempts.
- 4) *Have friends around/Travel in a group (9.2%)* – respondents reported that they felt safer when they stayed in groups and moved with their friends. Some reported that friends stood up for them when they were confronted by bullies. Basically, respondents felt that safety in numbers was a good deterrent against possible bully attacks.
- 5) *Fight back/Retaliate (6.0%)* – being aggressive or more aggressive than the bully was how some respondents managed to get around bullying. Giving the bullies tit for tat treatment, stopped further harassment for a couple of these respondents.

- 6) *Became a bully/Joined a gang (5.2%)* – respondents here either chose to become a bully or had been bullying others and they felt that it was a good method to prevent getting bullied themselves.
- 7) *Being nice/Talk things out with the bully (4.8%)* – respondents believed that by being humble and showing respect they could get others around to help them elude getting bullied. Some had success by reasoning with the bullies and sorting out their differences. Others tried to be nice to the bullies and improved the relationship with them.
- 8) *Low profile (4.0 %)* – the idea here was to be inconspicuous in the presence of the bullies. Methods like avoiding eye contact with them and minding their own business while not being bothered with what the bullies were doing helped some of the respondents.
- 9) *Others (6.4%)* – some respondents under this category recalled situations where they skipped schools or hid in the toilet to avoid the bullying. Having supportive parents and being a bystander were some of the other ways mentioned by respondents.

How bullying was avoided	No. of responses	Percentage
Avoid/Ignore	97	38.6%
Seek help/Report the bullies	35	13.9%
Stand up to them/Warn them	30	12.0%
Have friends around/Travel in a group	23	9.2%
Fight back/Retaliate	15	6.0%
Became a bully/Join a gang	13	5.2%
Be nice/Talk things out with the bully	12	4.8%
Low profile	10	4.0%
Others	16	6.4%
TOTAL	251	100%

Table A19. Figures and percentages of the 9 categories of successful methods used by respondents to avoid bullying. Arranged in descending order, except for "Others".

We could see that of respondents who avoided bullying, the highest percentage utilised the Avoid/Ignore method. The method least applied was keeping a Low Profile. It is shown that seeking help and standing up to the bully/bullies were also frequently employed methods besides avoiding or ignoring them.

Similarities were noticed when comparing some of the methods respondents suggested and used to prevent bullying from happening to them. Methods like Keeping a low profile, Avoid or ignore, Seeking help, Fighting back and Standing up to the bullies were some of them. The suggestion to become a bully to reduce the chance of or prevent one from being bullied had, in fact, been employed by some of the respondents (3 out of 7). 11 out of the 15 respondents who reported becoming bullies were in the Bullied group.

## APPENDIX B

**SURVEY ON BULLYING EXPERIENCES****INTRODUCTION :**

Good morning/afternoon/evening, I am \_\_\_\_\_ , an interviewer from InResearch Private Limited (SHOW AUTHORISATION CARD), a market research company in Singapore. On behalf of Singapore Children's Society, we are currently conducting a survey to find out experiences that people may have gone through during their school days. We would appreciate it if you could cooperate with us by answering some questions. Please be assured that all responses provided by you will be kept strictly confidential.

**SCREENING QUESTIONS**SHOWCARD S1

S1. Please look at this showcard and tell me which age group you belong to?	Below 25 years 25 to 29 years 30 years and above	1 (END INTERVIEW) 2 3 (END INTERVIEW)
S2. Did you study in a local primary or secondary school?	Yes No	1 2 (END INTERVIEW)
S3. Are you a... (READ OUT)?	Singapore citizen Singapore PR Others	1 2 3 (END INTERVIEW)

SHOWCARD 1

1. Let's talk about being bullied. Please look at this showcard on the definition of being bullied. Being bullied means repeated and intentional attempts by others to hurt you or to cause distress to your daily life. Do you feel that you have been bullied during your primary or secondary school days?	Yes No	1 (GO TO Q2) 2 (GO TO Q7)
2. Do you think being bullied during your school days has affected your life now?	Yes No	1 (GO TO Q3) 2 (GO TO Q4)

SHOWCARD 3

3. In what ways has being bullied affected your life now? Has being bullied affected you in the following ways?

	Yes	No
a. Easily anxious or nervous	1	2
b. Depressed or long periods of sadness	1	2
c. Lower self-esteem or self-worth or self-confidence	1	2
d. Shy or afraid to meet new people	1	2
e. Trouble forming or maintaining relationships or friendships	1	2
f. Easily frustrated or short-tempered (gets angry easily)	1	2
g. Feelings of being insecure or lack of confidence or assurance or self-doubt	1	2
h. Feelings of being vulnerable (liable/susceptible to physical or emotional attacks)	1	2
i. Others (specify: _____ )	1	2

SHOWCARD 4a & 4b

4. During your primary or secondary school days, how often have you... (READ OUT)? Is it daily/almost daily, about once a week, about 2 to 3 times a month, about once a month, less often/hardly ever or never?

	Daily/ almost daily	About once a week	About 2-3 times a month	About once a month	Less often/ hardly ever	Never
a. Been pushed around or beaten by others	1	2	3	4	5	6
b. Receive threats of harm, intimidation or hostile gestures towards you	1	2	3	4	5	6
c. Been taunted, scolded or had vulgarities hurled at you	1	2	3	4	5	6
d. Been teased about something or received sarcasm in a malicious or cruel way	1	2	3	4	5	6
e. Been called nasty names or received degrading comments about you	1	2	3	4	5	6
f. Suffered from group exclusion or the dissolving/manipulating of friendships	1	2	3	4	5	6
g. Had people spread nasty rumours or gossiped something bad about you	1	2	3	4	5	6
h. Others (specify: _____ )	1	2	3	4	5	6

5. When you were bullied during your school days, did you seek help from anyone or any organization?	Yes	1 (GOTO Q6a)
	No	2 (GO TO Q7)

6a. Who did you seek help from? **(INTERVIEWER: RECORD UP TO TWO SOURCES OF HELP)**

b. What was the outcome of your seeking help from... (READ OUT SOURCE)? Did it help to make things better, worse or no change at all?

a.	b.		
Source of Help	Made things better	Made things worse	No change at all
1. _____	1	2	3
2. _____	1	2	3

SHOWCARD 7a & 7b

7. Please look at this list of statements. For each statement, please tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with it.

**(INTERVIEWER TO READ OUT STATEMENTS, ONE AT A TIME)**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a. On the whole, you are satisfied with yourself	1	2	3	4
b. At times, you think you are no good at all	1	2	3	4
c. You feel that you have a number of good qualities	1	2	3	4
d. You are able to do things as well as most other people	1	2	3	4
e. You feel you do not have much to be proud of	1	2	3	4
f. You certainly feel useless at times	1	2	3	4
g. You feel that you are a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others	1	2	3	4
h. You wish you could have more respect for yourself	1	2	3	4
i. All in all, you are inclined to feel that you are a failure	1	2	3	4
j. You take a positive attitude toward yourself	1	2	3	4

SHOWCARD 8a & 8b

8. Here is another list of statements. For each statement, please tell me how you have been feeling over the last 2 weeks. Did you feel like this all the time, most of the time, more than half of the time, less than half of the time, some of the time or none of the time?

**(INTERVIEWER TO READ OUT STATEMENTS, ONE AT A TIME)**

	All the time	Most of the time	More than half of the time	Less than half of the time	Some of the time	None of the time
a. You have felt cheerful and in good spirits	1	2	3	4	5	6
b. You have felt calm and relaxed	1	2	3	4	5	6
c. You have felt active and vigorous	1	2	3	4	5	6
d. You woke up feeling fresh and rested	1	2	3	4	5	6
e. Your daily life has been filled with things that interest you	1	2	3	4	5	6

SHOWCARD 9a & 9b

9. Now, I will be showing you the final list of statements. For each statement, please tell me how you have been feeling over the last 2 weeks. Did you feel like this all the time, most of the time, more than half of the time, less than half of the time, some of the time or none of the time?

**(INTERVIEWER TO READ OUT STATEMENTS, ONE AT A TIME)**

	All the time	Most of the time	More than half of the time	Less than half of the time	Some of the time	None of the time
a. You felt low in spirits or sad	1	2	3	4	5	6
b. You lost interest in your daily activities	1	2	3	4	5	6
c. You felt lacking in energy and strength	1	2	3	4	5	6
d. You felt less self-confident	1	2	3	4	5	6

	All the time	Most of the time	More than half of the time	Less than half of the time	Some of the time	None of the time
e. You had a bad conscience or feelings of guilt	1	2	3	4	5	6
f. You felt that life wasn't worth living	1	2	3	4	5	6
g. You had difficulty in concentrating e.g. when reading newspapers or watching TV	1	2	3	4	5	6
h. You felt very restless	1	2	3	4	5	6
i. You felt subdued or slowed down	1	2	3	4	5	6
j. You had trouble sleeping at night	1	2	3	4	5	6
k. You suffered from reduced appetite	1	2	3	4	5	6
l. You suffered from increased appetite	1	2	3	4	5	6

10. Looking back at your primary and secondary school days, can you think of anything that could have been done to stop or prevent bullying from happening?

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11a. During your primary or secondary school days, have you ever encountered a situation where you managed to avoid being bullied?	Yes	1 (GOTO Q11b)
	No	2 (GO TO D1)

11b. How did you manage to avoid being bullied?

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## DEMOGRAPHICS

D1. How old are you?	25 years	1
	26 years	2
	27 years	3
	28 years	4
	29 years	5

### SHOWCARD D2

D2. What is your highest educational level?	Didn't complete primary	1	} GO TO D3
	Completed Primary but not Secondary	2	
	Completed Secondary but not Post-Secondary (JC, Poly, Lasalle, NAFA, Shatec, ITE)	3	
	Completed Post-Secondary (JC, Poly, Lasalle, NAFA, Shatec, ITE)	4	(GO TO D4)
	Completed University	5	(GO TO D4)
D3. Was being bullied one of the reasons for not completing primary*/secondary*/post-secondary* school education?	Yes	1	
	No	2	

*\*Interviewer to read according to answer in D2*

**INTERVIEWER: IF D3=YES AND Q1=NO,  
PLEASE CLARIFY WITH RESPONDENT ON HIS/HER ANSWER**

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D4. RECORD GENDER	Male	1
	Female	2
D5. RECORD RACE	Chinese	1
	Malay	2
	Indian	3
	Others (Specify: _____ )	4
D6. ASK/RECORD HOUSE-TYPE	HDB 1-3 Room	1
	HDB 4 Room	2
	HDB 5 Room/Exec/Maisonette	3
	Private Apartment/Condominium	4
	Landed Property	5

.....

Name of Respondent: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Number : \_\_\_\_\_

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**THANK RESPONDENT & END INTERVIEW**

## APPENDIX C

The following is a list of websites of some anti-bullying agencies around the world. The websites provides information on what is bullying and what can be done to prevent being bullied.

Bully-Free Campaign. (2010). Retrieved 5 January, 2010, from  
<http://www.bullyfreecampaign.sg/>

Bullying. No way!. (2010). Retrieved 5 January, 2010, from  
<http://www.bullyingnoway.com.au/>

Bullying.org. (2010). Retrieved 5 January, 2010, from  
<http://www.bullying.org/>

Bullying UK. (2010). Retrieved 5 January, 2010, from  
<http://www.bullying.co.uk/>

BullyingCanada. (2010). Retrieved 5 January, 2010, from  
<http://www.bullyingcanada.ca/>

Coalition Against Bullying for Children & Youth. (2010). Retrieved 5 January, 2010, from  
<http://www.hrttd.com.sg/CABCY/>

No Bully. (2010). Retrieved 5 January, 2010, from  
<http://www.police.govt.nz/service/yes/nobully/>

Stop Bullying. (2010). Retrieved 5 January, 2010, from  
[http://www.stopbully.hk/ypp\\_should\\_do.htm](http://www.stopbully.hk/ypp_should_do.htm)

Stop Bullying Now!. (2010). Retrieved 5 January, 2010, from  
<http://www.stopbullyingnow.com/>

## APPENDIX D

The following is a list of websites of anti-bullying games which was mentioned earlier in the monograph.

Anti-Bullying Game. *Therapeutic Resources*. (2010). Retrieved 2 February, 2010, from <http://www.therapeuticresources.com/21174text.html>

FearNot!. *Ecircus*. Retrieved 2 February, 2010, from <http://www.e-circus.org/>

Standing Up to Bullying Computer Game. *Buliding Strong Families National Seminars*. (2010). Retrieved 2 February, 2010, from <http://www.strongfamilies.us/computergame.php>